Stranger Twins: The Early Years by bgtbgtbgbgt

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Summary:

A look at our favourite twins and their friends before everything got flipped Upside Down.

1. New Friends

“Mommy!” Richie Wheeler screeches as he barrels across the blacktop playground of Hawkins Elementary towards his mother. His twin brother Michael stumbles along behind him, grumbling as he attempts to pull his wrist from Richie's tight hold.

“Hi, sweetheart,” Karen Wheeler grins, squatting down to envelope her twins in a tight hug. “How was your first day of preschool?” she asks as she brushes one of Michael's curls behind his ear.

“Awesome!” Richie cries, nearly punching his mother in the face as he thrusts an excited fist into the air.

Karen chuckles, shaking her head at her eldest son's enthusiasm as she leads the two children around the side of the Station Wagon.

“Did you have a good day as well, Mikey?" Karen asks her other son as she pulls the back door of the Station Wagon open. Richie scrambles up into the car with his hands and knees, throwing himself across the bench until he's sat next to his older sister Nancy.

“Yes, Mommy,” Michael answers, nodding his head as he climbs up into the seat next to his brother.

“Good,” Karen hums, ducking to press an affectionate kiss to Mike's forehead before slamming the car door shut.

Karen can hear Richie's chants of her name through the sealed windows as she moves around the front of the car towards the driver's seat. She shakes her head in amusement as she opens the door and collapses down into the driver's seat.

“Yes, Richie?” Karen interrupts Richie's overzealous chanting as she turns the keys in the Station Wagon's ignition. She turns her head to look out the back window as she reverses out of a spot in the school's parking lot, Richie's curls bouncing in her peripheral vision.

“Me and Mikey made a friend today!” Richie blurts in excitement.

“A friend?” Karen hums distractedly, turning to the right to check for

oncoming traffic as she pulls out onto Hawkins Drive.

“Uh huh,” Richie grunts, nodding his head vigourously. “And he’s so nice, right Mikey?” Richie blathers, pausing briefly for Mike to murmur a soft 'Mmhm' in agreement. “And guess what his name is!” Richie cries excitedly.

“What’s his name, honey?” Karen asks, smiling as her eyes flicker towards Richie’s impassioned reflection in her rear-view mirror.

“Eddie!” Richie yells, throwing his arms in the air.

“Inside voice, Richie," Karen reminds the overexcited boy.

"Sorry, Mommy," Richie apologizes in a mock whisper that causes Karen's lips to crack into a soft smile.

"So, Eddie, huh?" Karen prompts, eyes flickering between the road and her children's reflection in her rear-view mirror.

"I think he's my besets friend ever," Richie declares, kicking his feet against the seat absentmindedly.

“That’s stupid, Richie,” Nancy pipes up, looking up from the picture book in her lap for the first time since Karen had pulled the Station Wagon out onto the main road. "He's the first friend you've ever made!"

“Mommy!” Richie whines, elbowing Nancy in the bicep angrily.

"Ow!" Nancy cries, rubbing at her arm exaggeratedly.

“Nancy said a bad word!” Richie declares with a pout, pointing at Nancy as if it would help Karen to assign blame to her.

"Well, Richie hurt me!" Nancy counters, her own pout scrunching her face.

“Nancy Wheeler, you know better that to use naught words,” Karen reprimands lightly.

"Sorry, Mommy," Nancy mumbles through her pout, glaring at Richie

as he sticks his tongue out at her in victory.

"Richie Wheeler," Karen calls, watching her mischievous son through the rear-view mirror. The boy's tongue retracts into his mouth and his triumphant grin drops. "You know we don't hit!"

"But, Mommy," Richie starts urgently, leaning forward so his chin rests on the seat near Karen's shoulder. "I didn't hit," he argues with a serious expression.

"Richard," Karen sighs, indicating to the child that she wasn't interested in debating semantics with him.

"Whatever," Richie grunts, throwing himself back into his seat with his arms crossed over his chest. "Eddie *is* my besets friend and we're gonna be besets friends forever and ever and ever until we *die*!" Richie declares matter-of-factly.

“Richie,” Karen huffs, shaking her head at the boy's dramatics with a small smile.

“For real, Mommy!” Richie insists, leaning forward in his seat again. “I'm really sad though 'cause Eddie has lots of sickies,” he shares with a grave expression.

“Oh, really?” Karen hums with mild interest, eyes focused intently on the road.

“Yup!" Richie pops. "He gets so sick he can't even play outside at recess! I'm so sorry at him for that," Richie declares solemnly.

“That is too bad,” Karen agrees, mimicking her son’s serious tone.

“And he’s a-sick of peanut butter too, Mommy,” Richie continues urgently, voice full of disbelief. “He can’t have any peanut butter or he can’t breathe! I’m so sorry for him for that," the boy lisps making Karen smile privately.

“So, Mommy,” Richie starts with a deep sigh. “We can’t have peanut butter sammiches anymore, okay? I don’t want my bestest friend Eddie to die!”

“I think it’s alright if you eat it, sweetie. Just not your friend,” Karen tries to reason with the child.

“Nuh uh,” Richie denies with a shake of his head, eyes wide and unblinking. “No peanut butter sammiches allowed. No more.”

“Alright, sweetie,” Karen concedes, shaking her head with a small smile before the car lapses into relative silence.

“Mommy, can Eddie come play at our house?” Richie asks, breaking through the quiet atmosphere filled with the sound of the pages of Nancy’s book turning and Mike suckling his thumb.

“Well, sure, sweetie,” Karen nods. “But he needs to ask his mommy first. We can probably organize a playdate though, sure.”

“We have to put away all the peanut butter first, though,” Richie hums to himself, mentally preparing for Eddie’s impending visit.

“Yeah, we do, don’t we?” Karen hums, humoring the boy.

“Have ta clean my room too,” Richie continues gravely. “Eddie’s really a-scared of messes.”

“He’s scared of them?” Karen asks, voice full of confusion.

“Mhm,” Richie nods. “His mommy says messes mean dirty and Eddie’s really a-sick of dirts. They make him so sickie he needs to go see the doctor all of the time!”

“That’s too bad.”

“He’s really a-scared of the doctors,” Richie continues with a frown. “But it’s okay, I told him doctors give you lollipops so they’re not a-scary.”

“That’s very good advice, sweetie,” Karen agrees. “Eddie doesn’t have to be afraid of the doctor. You’re right.”

Richie nods to himself again, turning to watch the trees pass outside of Mike’s window.

“Mommy?”

“Yes, Richie?”

“I think I should go with Eddie next time when he goes to the doctors.”

“Why’s that?”

“So, I can show him not to be a-scared,” Richie explains to his mother. “But if he’s still a-scared I can give him a big hug and make him feel pwotected.”

“That’s very sweet, love,” Karen smiles, looking back at Richie briefly before turning off the main road and onto their street. "I'm sure he'd appreciate that very much."

2. Scraped Knees

Summary for the Chapter:

> I'm loving writing this. It's really getting me back into this series!
>
> As always, I love feedback!

“Oh, Eddie Bear,” Sonia called as soon as Eddie stepped foot outside of the school door. Eddie grinned at his mother, turning to wave at two boys who were standing behind him before moving to sprint towards his mother. “No running!” Sonia shrieked, making Eddie’s feet, as well as his smile, falter.

The little boy let out a small cry as his feet twisted together before he fell to his hands and knees.

“Eddie!” Sonia wailed, waddling towards her crying son on the other side of the blacktop playground. “I’m coming, Eddie Bear! Mommy’s coming!”

Eddie shifted to sit on his bum, cradling his skinned palm between his bleeding knees.

“Hey!”

Eddie looked up at the sound of Richie’s voice, the dark haired boy and his twin brother running towards him.

“Are you okay, Eddie Spaghetti?” Richie asked, breathing heavily as he squatted down next to Eddie, his twin brother hovering nearby. Their kindergarten class had been learning about rhyming lately and ever since he had figured out Eddie’s name rhymed with Spaghetti he had been calling his best friend by the nickname. If he was being honest, it had started out of jealousy. He wanted *his* name to rhyme with spaghetti *so* bad. It was his favourite food *ever*.

“Nuh uh,” Eddie sniffled, still staring at his bleeding knees as tears rolled down his round cheeks.

“Eddie Bear, I'm here! It's okay!”

The three boys looked up at the hulking woman before them, blocking the sunshine and leaving them in her dark shadow.

“Mommy!” Eddie wailed suddenly, raising his arms for his mother to pick him up.

“Oh, my baby,” Sonia cried, equally as dramatic as she rocked her son back and forth.

“It’s okay, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie squeaked, gaining Sonia’s attention. “Mikey and I fall all the time!”

Eddie continued to cry, sniffling as he stared down at his friend who was now holding one of his ankles where it hung in the air.

“You just gots ta cwean it and your mommy’ll kiss it better,” Richie explained, face serious. “And then you get super cwool band-aids, right Mikey?”

Mike nodded silently, looking at Sonia nervously.

“See, look,” Richie continued, releasing Eddie’s ankle and falling back onto the ground and hiking the knees of his shorts up. “I gwot Spidy-man, Looney Twoons, Woody Woodpecker, and Scooby-Dooby-Doo!” Richie cried, mimicking the animated dog’s catchphrase.

Eddie giggled, half of his face hidden against his mother’s chest, making Richie smile brightly.

“We need to get these cleaned before they get infected,” Sonia told Eddie turning to head back to her car.

“Buh-bye, Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie called, waving frantically at his friend who grinned, chin resting on his mother’s shoulder.

“Bye-bye, Richie,” Eddie smiled, waving at his friend. “Bye-bye, Mikey.”

“Who were those boys, Eddie Bear?” Sonia asked, as she wiped at his knees with disinfectant in the backseat of her car where Eddie was propped in his booster seat.

“My friends,” Eddie explained softly, wincing at the stinging pain of the antiseptic.

“Friends?”

“Mhm,” Eddie nodded. “Richie and Mikey. They’re eye-dental twins!”

“Hmm,” Sonia hummed, rubbing harder at her son’s knee making him cry out slightly. “Oh, sorry sweetheart.”

“S’okay, mommy,” Eddie sniffled, chin to his chest as his eyes stung with unshed tears.

“You know you’re not to be running, Eddie Bear,” Sonia scolded, bandaging Eddie’s knees with plain beige band-aids making him frown and think about Richie’s colourful ones.

“M’sorry, mommy,” Eddie told her in a small, wistful voice. “Richie and Mikey run all the time. It looked fun.”

“Well, was it worth it Eddie?” Sonia shrilled. “Look at you now! You know you’re fragile!”

“I know, mommy,” Eddie whispered. “I won’t run anymore, promise.”

“Good boy,” Sonia nodded, pressing a kiss to Eddie’s forehead before climbing out of the back seat and moving towards the driver’s seat.

“Mommy,” Eddie asked quietly as Sonia buckled her seatbelt, watching as Richie and Mike were buckled into their mom’s car. “Richie asked me if I could go to his house to play. Can I, mommy?”

“To play?”

“Please, mommy, please!” Eddie begged, watching as Karen Wheeler approached their car before knocking on Sonia’s window.

“Yes?” Sonia asked as she rolled down her window.

“Hello, I’m Karen Wheeler,” Karen greeted, smiling at Eddie in the back seat and holding a hand out for Sonia to shake. “I’m Michael and Richard’s mother.”

“Sonia,” Sonia greeted shortly, shaking the woman’s hand quickly.

“Um, well,” Karen grinned. “The boys were wondering if Eddie would like to come over for a playdate sometime this week.”

Eddie squeaked excitedly but otherwise kept his mouth shut. His mother had taught him not to interrupt while adults were speaking.

“I’m sorry, but,” Sonia shook her head. “Eddie has a lot of health concerns-”

“Oh, believe me, I’ve heard all about them from Richie,” Karen laughed, smiling at the little boy. “We’ll make sure to be extra careful. You’re welcome to come over for lunch during the playdate if you’re worried about leaving him.”

“Please, mommy,” Eddie whimpered quietly, feet bouncing excitedly against the hard plastic of his booster seat.

“I’ll think about it, Karen,” Sonia responded before moving to roll her window back up. “Eddie, how many times have I told you not to interrupt when mommy’s speaking,” Sonia scolded as she reversed out of her parking spot, leaving a frowning Karen Wheeler in her wake.

“Sorry, mommy,” Eddie whispered with a frown, crossing his arms over his chest and shrugging down in his seat sadly.

3. Fast Socks

Summary for the Chapter:

> I don't know man, these boys are just too damn cute not to write about.

As soon as his mother unbuckled his seatbelt Eddie was out of the car and skipping up the steps to the Wheelers' front door. Sonia had reluctantly agreed to lunch and a playdate at the Wheelers' house on a Saturday afternoon.

"Edward Kaspbrak," Sonia hissed as she watched Eddie rush up the stairs, tripping ever so slightly on the top step. "You're going to fall, be careful!"

"Sorry, mommy," Eddie pouted, bouncing on the balls of his feet as he clutched his hands tightly in front of him. "Can I ring the door bell, mommy?"

"No, too many germs," Sonia shook her head, grabbing one of Eddie's pudgy hands before rapping on the white door.

Eddie bounced excited, grinning as he heard the sound of screaming boys and chants of his name coming from the other side of the door.

"EDDIE SPAGHETTI!" Richie cried, throwing the front door open and letting it slam back into the wall behind it loudly.

"Hiya, Richie!" Eddie grinned, still bouncing and holding his mother's hand.

"Richard Wheeler!" Karen yelled from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dish cloth as she approached the front door. "How many times have I told you not to answer the door on your own, young man?"

"A bajillion," Richie responded, looking up at his mother innocently.

"You're only five, Richie," Karen scolded, the corners of her lips twitching slightly at Richie's innocent look. "It's dangerous."

“It’s only Eddie Spaghetti and his mommy, though!”

“Yeah, this time it was, Richie,” Karen reminded before turning towards Sonia and Eddie. “Sonia, Eddie! Come in!”

The two entered the house, Eddie standing on his toes excitedly as his mother helped him remove his fall coat while Richie spoke to him about his toy cars, mouth moving a mile a minute. Sonia took her time to peer around the foyer, silently scrutinizing each piece of furniture and décor.

“C’mon,” Richie grinned once Eddie had his shoes off, his toes curling and uncurling excitedly in his race car socks. Richie grabbed Eddie’s hand pulling him down the hallway towards the basement where he and Mike had set up a new track for their cars.

“Careful, Eddie,” Sonia called after them, clutching her chest nervously as they bounded down the stairs.

“Lunch is just about ready,” Karen smiled, regaining Sonia’s attention.

“And then,” Richie took a breath, breaking his stream of words for the first time in nearly five minutes. “They go down the track from the couch jump up onto the table, shoot over the cushion and smash down into the junkyard!”

“Wow! That’s so cool, but what if-”

Richie and Eddie had been chattering non-stop since Eddie had arrived twenty minutes ago. The two were almost constantly talking over each other but their conversation seemed to flow despite the chaos.

“Boys!” Karen called from the top of the stairs. “Lunch is ready!”

“Guess what we’re having for lunch, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie grinned, tossing down the two cars he had been holding and leading Eddie and his brother up the stairs.

“What, Rich?”

“SPAGHETTI!” Richie cried making both boys dissolve into a fit of giggles, hands clutched between them.

“What’s so funny you two?” Karen smiled as the two boys entered the kitchen behind Mike, giggling wildly.

“Nothing,” the two chimed together, smiling up at Karen who shook her head with amusement.

“Silly monkeys,” Karen smiled, ruffling Richie’s hair. “Okay, get your hands washed before lunch, go on.”

“C’mon, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie tugged on his hand, leading Eddie to the first-floor bathroom. “My mommy bought me ‘n Mikey *green alien* soap! It’s so cool!”

The two entered the two-piece bathroom just as Mike was leaving.

“See, look!” Richie cried, picking up the green hand soap covered in alien stickers to show Eddie

“Wow, that is so cool,” Eddie nodded, eyes wide with excitement as he cupped hands for Richie to squeeze some soap into.

Richie pumped green foam into his own palm before replacing the soap on the counter and turning on the tap, leaning forward and rubbing his hands together under the running water.

“Ugh,” Eddie grunted, pressing up on his tiptoes trying to reach the water. “Oof, Rich I can’t reach!”

“Lemme help you,” Richie smiled, moving behind Eddie to bend his knees and wrap his soapy arms around Eddie’s waist before lifting Eddie half an inch off the group. “Good?” Richie grunted with effort.

“Bit more,” Eddie squeaked, arms reaching out to pull himself up onto the counter. “There!”

“Hurry,” Richie groaned.

“Almost done!”

“Hurry, Eddie, hurry!”

“Okay, I’m done!” Eddie announced, reaching over to turn the tap off before Richie dropped him down to the ground, stomach hitting the edge of the sink on the way down. “Thanks, Richie!”

“You’re welcome, Eddie Spaghetti!”

The two returned to the kitchen, Eddie’s shirt wet where Richie had been holding on to him and Richie’s arms sticky with residual soap.

“What happened to you two?” Karen laughed, watching the two boys enter the room with clasped hands.

“Eddie!” Sonia cried, turning to look at the two boys. “You’re all wet! You’re gonna get the chills and the last thing we need is you getting pneumonia again!”

“It’s okay, mommy,” Eddie smiled, holding his wet shirt away from his skin. “It’s just water, it’ll dry!”

“Tap water is full of countless germs, Eddie,” Sonia ranted as Richie led Eddie to the kitchen table.

“You can sit in my spot, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie smiled, gesturing for Eddie to take a seat on the blue booster seat on one of the chairs.

Eddie climbed up onto the chair, grinning as Richie took his sister’s empty pink booster seat. Nancy was at a playdate with Barbra.

“Okay, okay,” Karen called, carrying three plastic bowls of spaghetti and meatballs. “Who’s hungry?”

“Me! Me! Me!” the boys called, chattering happily as Karen set the food in front of them, Sonia hovering over Eddie and cutting his already cut up spaghetti and meatballs further to ensure he didn’t choke.

“Mommy!” Richie shouted across the room towards the kitchen where Sonia and Karen we’re discussing the Hawkins kindergarten teacher. “Mommy, mommy, mommy!”

“Yes, Richie?” Karen sighed, turning towards the table of children.

“We’re done!”

“Okay, sweetie,” Karen nodded. “You guys can head downstairs. I’ll get your bowls in a second.”

“Eddie, wanna see me and Mikey’s new choo choo train set?”

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, pushing back from the table excitedly and scrambling down to the floor, fingers catching the edge of his bowl and sending it flying to the floor in the process.

“Oh, no!” Richie giggled at the tomato sauce covering his and Eddie’s socks, as well as Eddie’s t-shirt.

“Edward Kaspbrak!” Sonia shouted, flying across the room to scold her son.

“Mommy, I’m sorry,” Eddie wailed, chin tucking against his chest as he sobbed at the mess he’d made.

“Oh, sweetie,” Karen cooed, coming over to lift the bowl off the ground. “It’s okay, it’s alright.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!” Eddie chanted, shoulders shaking as he cowered into himself, toes curling nervously.

“Eddie, sweetie, it’s okay,” Karen spoke softly, trying to reassure the sobbing boy.

“Edward Kaspbrak,” Sonia continued to shout. “I've told you a million times, you need to be more careful!”

“I’m sorry mommy!” Eddie whimpered, fist rubbing at his running

nose. “It was an accident. I’m sorry!”

“It’s okay, Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie spoke kindly, grabbing his friends arm. “My mommy can clean our clothes and you can borrow one of my shirts! Right, mom?”

“Of course,” Karen nodded.

“No, no,” Sonia interrupted. “We should really get going.”

“It’s really no trouble,” Karen insisted.

“No, we’re leaving,” Sonia repeated.

“At least let me get him some clean socks, Sonia,” Karen frowned. “So, he doesn’t ruin his shoes.”

“C’mon, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie smiled, tugging his friend towards the stairs leading upstairs. “I’ll show you my room and you can borrow some of my socks!”

“What colour?” Richie asked, pulling open his dresser drawer to reveal a rainbow of sock colours.

“Um,” Eddie bit his lip. “Any colour.”

“Nah, c’mon Eddie,” Richie nudged his arm. “Pick any one you want!”

“My favourite colour’s red,” Eddie murmured.

“Kay,” Richie grinned, grabbing the red socks with flames. “These are my special *fast* socks!”

“Fast socks?”

“Yeah, see the fire,” Richie pointed as he unrolled the children’s socks. “They’re on fire because they make you go so fast! As fast as a race car!”

“Wow,” Eddie murmured. “That’s amazing.”

“Mhm,” Richie nodded. “They’re my favourite. I don’t even let Mike wear them!”

“Oh,” Eddie muttered, eyebrows scrunching. “I can’t borrow them.”

“Why not?” Richie asked, face falling.

“’Cause they’re your favourite, Rich!” Eddie cried. “What if I ruin them? I’m so clumsy, look what I did to my race car socks, Richie!”

“Nah, it was an accident, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie smiled, holding the socks out to Eddie. “I trust you to take super good care of them!”

The boys descended the stairs hand in hand. Sonia was already bundled in her coat and waiting impatiently by the door with Karen.

“Your fast socks?” Karen asked with disbelief as she noticed the flaming socks Eddie was wearing. She had broken up at least three fights in the last month between the twins fighting over Mike trying to wear Richie’s ‘fast socks’.

“Mhm,” Richie nodded. “Eddie’s favourite colour’s red and he’s gonna take care of them."

“Okay,” Karen nodded, pretending that was a valid explanation.

“Come on, Eddie,” Sonia spoke up, holding out Eddie’s coat for him to put on. “We need to get you home so you can take your medicine.”

Eddie shrugged his coat on before sitting down in the Wheelers’ foyer to pull his Velcro shoes on then standing to look at Karen.

“Thank you for letting me come play, Mrs. Richie and Mikey’s-mom,” Eddie smiled up at Karen.

“You’re welcome to come over anytime, sweetheart,” Karen grinned.

“Eddie, c’mon,” Sonia insisted, moving to open the door.

“Buh-bye, Mikey,” Eddie waved at the quiet boy who was standing beside his mother, getting a hesitant wave in return. “Buh-bye Richie!”

“Bye, Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie cried, running forward to hug Eddie tightly. “Do you wanna come over tomo-whoa again?”

Eddie gasped with excitement and nodded.

“Mommy, can Eddie come over tomo-whoa?”

“We’ll see, Richie,” Karen nodded, eyeing Sonia. “It’s up to his mommy.”

Richie pouted but nodded.

“See ya tomo-whoa maybe,” Richie told Eddie who nodded back at him. “Take care of my fast socks!”

“I will,” Eddie promised seriously.

“Okay,” Richie grinned, leaning forward to kiss Eddie’s cheek, making the smaller boy look at him in surprise. “Bye, Eddie Spaghetti!”

“Bye,” Eddie squeaked with pink cheeks, stumbling to follow his mother out the door, making Karen laugh.

4. The Sleepover

After their first playdate, Eddie became an almost permanent fixture in the Wheeler house. He'd spent hours after school each day playing with Richie and Mike in their basement until Sonia arrived at five o'clock on the dot to take Eddie home for dinner and his medicine.

Today, however, Richie would be going over to Eddie's house for a sleepover. Eddie had invited Mike as well, but the nervous boy didn't want to go without his mother as Sonia scared him.

"Hi, Mrs. Kas-bwak," Richie grinned as Sonia opened the door to find Karen and Richie waiting on the porch. The curly haired boy carried a stuffed dog in one hand and a mini rolling race car suitcase holding a toothbrush and pair of pajamas in the other.

"Richie," Sonia smiled tightly at the boy and his mother. "Eddie Bear, your friend's here!"

"Richie!" came the squealing voice of a five-year-old Eddie, running full speed down the stairs towards the front door.

"Edward Kaspbrak!" Sonia barked making the small boys smile falter as he reached the landing.

"Sorry, mommy," Eddie whispered, continuing to approach the door with a small grin he was shooting at Richie. "Hi, Richie!"

"Hiya, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie grinned back, stepping into the Kaspbrak house for the first time.

"Richie! We're gonna do so many fun stuffs," Eddie squealed, launching into a description of the race car track he had set up in his room in preparation for Richie's arrival.

"Richie, sweetie," Karen called, gaining the boys attention.

"Yes, mommy?"

"I'm heading out, okay?" Karen smiled, squatting down to pull Richie into a hug. "You be good for Mrs. Kaspbrak, okay?"

“Okay, mom,” Richie nodded earnestly.

“I’ll pick you up tomorrow morning at 10am, got it?” Karen reminded.

“Yup,” Richie squeaked, realising for the first time that he was going to be left in an unfamiliar place overnight. “Mommy,” Richie whispered, looking down at his dog Ruffy.

“Yes, sweetheart?” Karen smiled, brushing Richie’s hair away from his eyes.

“What if I’m scared?”

“Oh, honey,” Karen sighed. “There’s no reason to be scared. I’m just a phone call away if you need anything, okay?”

Richie nodded, lips pouted as tears began to well up in his eyes.

“It’s okay, Rich,” came Eddie’s squeaky little voice as the small boy approached them. “My mommy will keep us both safe.”

“Okay,” Richie nodded, sniffling slightly as Eddie took Richie’s mysteriously sticky hand in his own.

“I love you, sweetie,” Karen smiled, pressing a kiss to Richie’s forehead before straightening up.

“Love you too, mommy,” Richie mumbled.

“C’mon, Rich,” Eddie whispered, moving to grab Richie’s hand.

“Go on and have fun, love,” Karen encouraged.

“C’mon the super smash demolition derby is all set up!” Eddie squealed, tugging on Richie’s hand to gain his attention before pulling him in the direction of the stairs as Sonia said goodbye to Karen.

“Eddie,” came a gravelly voice from one of the rooms off of the foyer.

“Oh,” Eddie stopped, leading Richie towards the deep voice. “Yeah, daddy?”

The two boys stopped in front of a reclining chair holding a bald man with ventilator tubes twisting around him. Richie stepped back behind Eddie, scared by the stranger and his appearance.

“Who’s this?”

“This is Richie,” Eddie smiled. “He’s my best friend.”

“Is he now?”

“Uh huh,” Eddie nodded, dropping Richie’s hand and carefully climbing into his weak father’s lap. “Richie, this is my daddy.”

“Hello, there,” Frank greeted, arms settling around Eddie’s waist.

“Hi,” Richie squeaked, uncharacteristically nervous.

“Eddie Kaspbrak!” Sonia boomed as she entered the living room. “I’ve told you not to climb all over your father like that, you’re going to hurt him!”

“No, it’s okay, Sonia,” Frank protested as Eddie wriggled out of his grip and moved to stand with Richie, pouting sadly at the ground as his mother shouted.

“It’s not okay!”

“It is-”

“Let’s go upstairs, Rich,” Eddie whispered, grabbing Richie’s hand and leading him up the stairs to his bedroom quietly.

“So that’s your dad,” Richie said, watching Eddie push a toy car in circles sadly.

“Uh huh.”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“He’s sick,” Eddie explained, eyes trained on his blue toy car.

“Oh, my dad was sick last week too!” Richie laughed. “My mom made him a bunch of soup and brought him medicines to get better.”

“My daddy’s not gonna get better,” Eddie shook his head, pulling his knees to his chin as he continued staring at the toy on the ground in front of him.

“Why not?”

“He has cancer,” Eddie whispered.

“What’s…” Richie scooted closer to his friend. “What’s cancer, Eddie Spaghetti?”

“Means he’s really sick in his lungs-”

“Lungs?”

“They’re how you breathe.”

“Oh,” Richie nodded in understanding.

“He’s really sick and…” Eddie swallowed. “It means he’s gonna die.”

“What?” Richie sputtered. “No, he’s not, he can’t!”

“Why not?”

“’Cause he’s your dad, silly!” Richie shouted, throwing his arms out to his sides. “Dad’s don’t die!”

“Some do,” Eddie shrugged, hugging his knees to his chest tighter.

“Boys! Dinner!”

“When are you gonna die, Mr. Kas-bwak?”

“Richard Tozier!” Sonia shrieked, dropping her fork as Frank choked

on his food with surprise. Eddie turned to look at his father with hopeful eyes, wondering the same thing as his friend. “That is a rude-”

“Sonia, he’s only five,” Frank reminded her gently, grabbing her hand in his to calm her. “Why do you ask, Richie?”

“Well,” Richie started, eyes flicking to Sonia uneasily. “Eddie said you’re weally sick and gonna die. But he didn't know when.”

“Well, Eddie’s right,” Frank nods, smiling weakly at his son before fixing his stare on Richie. “But we don’t know how long I’ll be around. Hopefully a long time, but you never know… Death is just a part of life, Richie.”

Richie nodded, despite his complete lack of understanding.

Richie jumped as Eddie burst out into a wail in his seat next to him, reaching out for his father.

“Daddy, no!” Eddie sobbed, scrambling to the floor before climbing into his father’s lap and wrapping his chubby arms around Frank’s neck. “I don’t want you to die, please! I’ll be a good boy, I promise. Please don’t die!”

Frank shot Richie a kind look as he rocked his son and promised that Eddie’s behaviour had nothing to do with his health while Sonia cried into her hands.

“Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie whispered, reaching out a chubby fist to feel Eddie’s face in the dark room, groping to see if his eyes were still open. “You awake?”

“Ouch, my eye!”

“Sorry,” Richie apologized before dropping his hand to reach for Eddie’s. The two were laid in Eddie’s twin bed, heads bowed together and knees touching.

“S’okay.”

“Eddie?” Richie whispered, squeezing Eddie’s hand.

“Yeah, Rich?” Eddie whispered back, wriggling forward to see his friend more clearly.

“I’m sorry I made you sad at dinner,” Richie pouted, rubbing at his eyes with his free hand.

“That’s okay,” Eddie nodded, just as he was taught to do anytime someone apologized for doing something wrong.

“Eddie?”

“Yeah?”

“I miss my mommy and my daddy,” Richie squeaked, hiccupping as tears began falling down his cheeks and hiding his face slightly into Ruffy who had been laid next to him on the pillow.

“It’s okay, Rich,” Eddie comforted, moving to hug his best friend tightly. “You’re gonna see them tomorrow!”

“I know, but what if I don’t?” Richie wailed, hands curling in the front of Eddie’s pajama shirt.

“You will, I promise,” Eddie told his friend. “We can even call your mommy if you want? I a-member your phone number.”

“You do?” Richie asked, looking up at Eddie in awe.

“Yeah,” Eddie nodded proudly. “Daddy says I’m super-duper with number counting.”

“Woah, can you teach me?” Richie asked, completely forgetting about his homesickness.

“Yeah,” Eddie agreed, listing off the numbers and listening as Richie tried to recite them back until they both fell asleep.

5. Awergic Weaction

“Let’s go meet Bill!”

“Do we have to?” Eddie whined, packing his Tupperware containers back into his lunchbox neatly.

“He’s the new kid, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie laughed, shoving his now empty lunchbox into his cubby with sticky hands, the remnants of chocolate pudding smeared at the corners of his mouth. “He needs friends!”

“Fine,” Eddie sighed, putting his lunchbox into his own cubby hole.

“Hey, there!” Richie shouted, startling the redhead who was closing his own lunchbox at his desk. “I’m Richie!”

“Um,” Bill whispered, eyes wide as he stared up at the curly haired boy with giant glasses.

“And this is Eddie,” Richie continued, trying to pull Eddie out from behind him where he was clutching onto back of Richie’s shirt.

“Huh-huh-hello,” Bill stammered, cheeks pink.

“Nice to meet ya,” Richie grinned, sticking out his hand for Bill to shake.

Bill nodded with a shy smile, holding out his hand to Eddie in the same way.

“Oh,” Richie laughed, listening as Eddie whimpered from behind him. “Eddie’s a-scawed of gurms so he doesn’t like touching new people.”

“Oh,” Bill muttered, face falling as he dropped his hands.

“I’m sorry,” Eddie squeaked, pushing up onto his tip-toes to peer over Richie’s shoulder at the other boy.

“That’s okay,” Bill nodded, giving Eddie a small smile.

“Wanna pway with us at wecess?” Richie asked.

“Sure,” Bill nodded, eager to make new friends on his first day of school.

“Yay!” Richie cheered. “We’re gonna pway with my brother Mikey and his friend Will too!”

“And this car goes super-fast!” Richie screamed, ramming his toy car over a bump and into the sand box energetically as he shared toy cars with the other four boys on the edge of the blacktop playground. “Almost as fast as my fast socks make me go!”

“That’s stupid, Richie,” Mike laughed softly, shaking his head at his brother. “Socks don’t make you faster!”

“No, it’s not!” Richie sputtered, glaring at his brother in shock. “They do so, wight Eddie Spaghetti?”

Eddie nodded, coughing into his elbow quietly.

“And, bwesides if they don’t make me a speed wacer then why do you always steal ‘em?”

“Because,” Mike argued back, rolling his eyes at his brother and arguing over the sound of Eddie’s hacking coughs.

“Are you okay?” Bill asked, placing a hand on Eddie’s shoulder as his breathing became shallow and whistle-y.

“Eddie Spaghetti?” Richie asked, stopping mid-argument to turn his attention towards his best friend. “Awe you okay?”

Eddie shook his head, scratching at his neck as his chest heaved.

“Do you need your medicines?” Richie asked, crawling towards his best friend and reaching into his black fanny pack before Eddie could

even nod.

“Mikey,” Richie gasped, pulling the cap off of Eddie’s asthma inhaler. “Go get the teach-uh!”

Richie shook Eddie’s asthma inhaler as Mike and Will scrambled to their feet, preparing Eddie’s medicine as he had watched his friend do numerous times before.

“Open up,” Richie whispered, hands shaking nervously as he pushed the mouthpiece of the inhaler between Eddie’s lips, holding his friend’s cheek with his freehand. Richie closed his eyes, pressing down on the puffer to release the medicine into Eddie’s lungs nervously. “Bett-uh?”

Eddie continued to wheeze painfully, tears leaking down his face as he struggled to breathe.

“Eddie?” Richie asked worriedly, Bill watching on with fright. “Again?”

Richie shot another puff of albuterol into Eddie’s lungs, staring down at his friend nervously. Eddie’s face had begun to swell and become oddly blue, scaring Richie.

“Eddie, awe you okay?” Richie cried, leaning down to hug his friend in a last-ditch effort to help him.

“Boys?”

Richie looked up into the worried eyes of their kindergarten teacher, tears running down his cheeks.

“His medicine won’t work,” Richie wailed, clutching Eddie to his chest as the smaller boy wheezed and coughed against him. “Help! Help, he’s gonna die!”

“I’m gonna go call an ambulance,” the teacher gasped before running towards the school leaving the four boys with a shaking Eddie who was slowly going into shock as his hands tinged blue with a lack of oxygen.

“Pwease, I wanna go with him,” Richie howled, struggling against the arms of the principal as the paramedics loaded an unconscious Eddie into the back of the ambulance.

As soon as they arrived they had given Eddie a shot of epinephrine in the thigh, making Richie wail that they were hurting him as Eddie’s breathing slowed and his shaking subsided ever so slightly.

“I need to go with him, I need to!” Richie continued to shout, tears streaming down his cheeks as the ambulance pulled away. “Eddie! Eddie! No!”

“Richie,” grumbled their principal, a gruff older man. “You need to calm down, Eddie will be just fine-”

“I hate you, let me go!” Richie shrieked, arms flailing as he wriggled out of the man’s grasp and began sprinting after the ambulance, collapsing to his knees dramatically as the ambulance disappeared from his view. “Eddie! Eddie!”

“Richie, sweetheart,” Karen sighed as she entered the school nurses’ office to find her five-year-old son curled into himself and staring determinedly at the wall next to the examination bed, away from his pouting brother.

“Mommy,” Richie whimpered, sitting up and turning towards his approaching mother. “Mommy, they took him! I need to go see Eddie!”

“C’mere,” Karen hummed, wrapping her arms around Richie and settling him on her hip as Mike latched onto her leg, staring up at them nervously. “Shh, it’s okay, Richie. It’s okay, Eddie’s okay. Shh,” Karen soothed, rocking the crying boy as the school nurse watched on sadly.

“Eddie?!” Richie began screaming as soon as they stepped foot in the Hawkins General Hospital. “Eddie! Eddie Spaghetti?!”

“Richie, shh,” Karen scolded as she led the two children to the front desk. “Hi, we’re looking for-”

“My bestest friend Eddie Spaghetti might die!” Richie interrupted, pushing himself up onto his tiptoes and grabbing the edge of the reception desk. “I need to see him! Do you know where he is? He’s this tall-”

“Richie,” Karen scolded again, grabbing his hand from where it was pressed to his chin in a salute to indicate Eddie’s height. “We’re looking for Edward Kaspbrak. He was admitted today.”

“Um,” the receptionist looked down at her clipboard, flipping through the pages. “Pediatrics is on the eighth floor. Just turn left when you get off the elevator.”

“Thank you,” Karen nodded, leading the boys away from the reception desk as Richie continued to yap to the receptionist, describing Eddie’s appearance.

“Eddie?!”

“Richie,” Karen hissed, pulling the boy to a stop as they stepped off of the elevator. “I’m not going to tell you again, stop yelling! We’re in a hospital, you can’t yell here!”

“But,” Richie’s bottom lip jutted out sadly as his eyes filled with tears. “I need to find him, mommy.”

“I know, sweetheart,” Karen sighed, pulling him into a hug with her arm that wasn’t holding on to Mike. “I know, but we know where he is now. You don’t need to yell for him.”

“He'll be scared without me,” Richie continued, fat tears rolling down his cheeks. “He needs to know I’m here.”

“C’mon,” Karen breathed, straightening up and leading the boys towards the pediatric ward.

“Hello, sorry,” Karen stopped at the nurses’ station, eyes darting around with stress. “We’re looking-”

“Have you seen my Eddie Spaghetti?”

“Richard Wheeler, I’ve told you-”

“An Eddie Spaghetti, huh?” a young nurse asked, crouching down in front of Richie. “I think I might know a Mr. Eddie Spaghetti.”

“You know where my bestest friend is?!” Richie shouted, face lighting up as the blonde nurse nodded.

“Sorry,” Karen apologized embarrassedly. “He’s really worried about Eddie.”

“Don’t be sorry,” the nurse waved her hand nonchalantly. “C’mon, I’ll take you to Mr. Spaghetti’s room!”

“And then I jammed his puff-ah in his mouf,” Richie exclaimed, arms flailing as he recalled the story for the nurse as she led them towards Eddie’s room. “But, it didn’t work!”

“Oh no!” the nurse gasped, eyes sparkling with amusement.

“I guess it wasn’t his ass-mah,” Richie shrugged knowledgeably.

“You’re right, Dr. Richie,” the nurse nodded playfully. “He was actually having an allergic reaction.”

“Awergic weaction?”

“Uh huh,” the nurse nodded. “We’re thinking it was maybe peanuts.”

“He was a-sick from peanuts!” Richie shouts obnoxiously, mouth hung open in shock. “But we don’t have any more peanut butter because I don't want Eddie to get a-sick!”

“Well,” the nurse smiled as Karen shook her head at Richie’s volume. “Maybe someone else had peanuts.”

“Maybe,” Richie nodded thoughtfully as they arrived at the door with Eddie’s medical chart hanging in a basket out front of it.

“Knock, knock,” the nurse joked, knocking on the door as she led the three Wheelers into the room. “I have a special visitor for Mr. Eddie Spaghetti.”

“Eddie!” Richie wailed, barrelling through the door and scrambling to climb up onto Eddie’s bed, making the young nurse laugh fondly.

“Richie!” Eddie squealed delightedly.

“Be careful!” Sonia cried, jumping to push Richie off of the bed.

“It’s okay,” the nurse stepped in, making Sonia scowl. “Just be really careful with Eddie, alright Richie?”

Richie nodded, eyes wide as he finally made it up onto the mattress before crawling shyly up towards Eddie.

“Hi,” Richie squeaked, cheeks pink with embarrassment from being yelled at by Sonia.

“Hi, Rich,” Eddie giggled.

“You all bettah?” Richie asked, face full of worry.

Eddie nodded before Richie launched himself at Eddie, wrapping his arms around Eddie as the smaller boy reciprocated excitedly. Sonia squawked while the nurse gently leaned forward to interrupt them.

“Hey, boys,” she smiled gently as the two pulled away from each other to look at her. “See these,” she spoke softly, taking Eddie’s wrist in her hand and pointing out the intravenous lines entering Eddie’s hands. Richie nodded with wide eyes as Eddie’s chin tucked into his chest nervously, watching as the nurse touched his skin. “You gotta be super careful you don’t pull these out because they’re giving Eddie some super special nutrients to get better, okay?”

The both nodded silently, eyes wide and curious.

“Does it hurt?” Richie asked, fingers twitching as he restrained himself from poking curiously at the skin where the needle rested just under Eddie’s skin.

“It hurt putting it in,” Eddie spoke quietly so the other four could barely hear him. “I cried.”

“You did?”

Eddie nodded embarrassedly, chin tucking against his chest again.

“That’s okay,” Richie told him, leaning forward to hug him again. “I’m sure you were super brave.”

“Wish you were there,” Eddie murmured, squeezing Richie tightly.

“I tried,” Richie answered, voice panicked as he tried to explain himself, worried Eddie thought he didn’t want to go to the hospital with him. “But the stupid pair-meds wouldn’t let me!”

“Oh.”

“I thought you were gonna die,” Richie whispers, eyes welling up with tears once again.

“You did?”

“Uh huh,” Richie nods, still hugging his best friend tightly. “I was so scared!”

“I’m sorry,” Eddie whispers sadly.

“S’not your fault,” Richie shakes his head. “But don’t worry, I’m gonna find out who trieded to kill you with peanuts!”

“Really?”

“Uh huh!”

“Thanks, Richie!”

“No problem, Eddie Spaghetti!”

Notes for the Chapter:

spoiler: Bill had a peanut butter sandwich for lunch and touched one of Eddie's cars at recess.

6. I Think I Kinda Liked It

Notes for the Chapter:

I literally have no idea what this is...

“Eddie?” Karen whispered, peering around the door into Richie’s dark bedroom.

“Mommy?” Richie yawned, sitting up in his bed and rubbing at his eyes tiredly.

“Hi baby,” Karen sniffled. “I need to talk to Eddie.”

“Is it about his daddy?” Richie asked, eyes suddenly wide and terrified.

Eddie had spent the last two weeks staying with the Wheelers because his father was in the hospital and Sonia refused to let Eddie stay there with them.

“Yes,” Karen nodded sadly, turning on the small lamp on Richie’s nightstand.

“No,” Richie whimpered, sliding down onto his side and curling over top of Eddie’s sleeping body, making the smaller boy stir slightly. “No, mommy!”

“Richie,” Karen sighed, reaching out to rub at his back as Richie hid his face in Eddie’s shirt as the other boy snored into Richie’s twin mattress.

“He can’t die, mommy,” Richie continued, sobbing into Eddie’s pajama shirt.

“Richie?” Eddie groaned tiredly, wriggling around under Richie’s weight. “Your squishin’ me Rich, get off!”

“Eddie, sweetheart,” Karen spoke softly, making the smaller boy squeak with surprise.

“Yes?” Eddie mumbled, rolling out from under Richie and turning to face Karen with his knees pulled up to his chest.

“Eddie, your auntie just called me from the hospital,” Karen told him, reaching out to place a comforting hand on one of his knees.

“Did my daddy die?” Eddie squeaked, chin tucking in to his chest nervously as his eyes flitted between Richie and Karen, both of whom were crying.

“Yes,” Karen choked, wiping at her tears as Richie sobbed harder. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“He, he did?” Eddie hiccupped, breathing becoming shallow as his face turned pale before letting out a quiet gasp and howling in pain.

“I’m so sorry, sweetie,” Karen whispered, pulling the crying boy to her chest as he continued to scream, waking the other three Wheelers in the house. “I’m so sorry!”

“Eddie,” Richie sobbed, pulling at the back of Eddie’s t-shirt impatiently. “Let me, mommy! Let go!”

Karen sighed, but let go of Eddie enough for Richie to pull Eddie’s limp and sobbing form back into his chest, making the two topple over against Richie’s pillows.

The two children continued to sob and clutch each other as Karen warily wrapped Richie’s blankets around them before settling next to the bed once again and rubbing at Richie’s tight and bouncy curls.

The two boys awoke the next morning with swollen and red faces, arms and legs wrapped around each other haphazardly.

“Eddie Spaghetti?” Richie whispered, wondering if Eddie was also awake.

“Yeah?” Eddie sniffled, having woken up shortly before Richie.

“I’m so sorry about your daddy,” Richie whispered, squeezing Eddie tightly to him as the smaller boy did the same.

“Me too,” Eddie murmured before untangling himself from Richie and pushing himself to sit up and lean against the wall beside Richie’s bed. “I miss him,” Eddie whispered, pulling his knees to his chest as more tears fell from his eyes.

“Eddie Spaghetti?”

“Yeah, Rich?”

“Can I kiss you?” Richie asked quietly, watching Eddie face sadly. “Daddy always kisses mommy when she’s crying.”

“Okay,” Eddie whispered, staring at Richie with wide eyes as tears continued to slip down his cheeks.

“Okay,” Richie repeated, crawling towards Eddie and stopping in front of him.

Richie leaned over, lips parted slight too wide in an attempt to imitate the way he had seen people kiss on television. Richie pressed his open mouth over Eddie’s closed mouth, eyes wide as he stared into Eddie’s while their noses bumped.

Richie pulled back a few seconds later, sitting back on his heels as he stared at a grimacing Eddie.

“Wet,” Eddie commented, wiping the back of his hand across his mouth.

“Maybe,” Richie squeaked. “Maybe we did it wrong?”

“You think?” Eddie asked, looking to his friend for further information.

“Maybe you gotta open your mouth too,” Richie suggested.

“But then your spit’ll get in!” Eddie squealed.

“That’s how they do it on the TV though,” Richie continued, moving to lean closer to Eddie again. “Let’s just try.”

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, opening his mouth to mimic Richie and

leaning forward until their noses bumped together.

They locked their lips together, Richie titling his head slightly as they breathed heavily through their noses. They stared at each other, unsure of what they were supposed to do now, just waiting as their open mouths salivated against one another.

“That was weird,” Eddie murmured as they pulled back from one another, wiping at their mouths.

“Yeah,” Richie nodded with pink cheeks, staring down at Eddie’s bare feet. “But…I think I kinda liked it maybe…”

“You did?” Eddie asked, his own cheeks flushing at Richie’s admission.

“Yeah,” Richie whispered.

“I think I kinda did too,” Eddie admitted, smiling slightly at his best friend.

Notes for the Chapter:

> plot twist: ted wasn't always a POS husband and father.

7. His Richie

“Mommy,” Eddie whimpered as Sonia tried to put Eddie down to bed the first night back in their house after Frank’s death. Sonia had tried to keep Eddie at arms-length throughout Frank’s last days, leaving him with the Wheelers for the better part of two weeks despite Karen’s insistence that she was willing to bring Eddie to visit his dad in the hospital. Sonia had outright refused to let Eddie visit the hospital and instead hadn’t seen her son until he arrived at the funeral with the Wheeler family, clutching Richie’s hand in his little black suit.

“Yes, Eddie bear?” Sonia asked, face swollen from the near constant tears she had been crying for the last few days.

“Want Richie,” Eddie whimpered, eyes glistening as he clutched Ruffy to his chest. Richie had insisted Eddie hold on to him because Ruffy was really good at making people feel less sad.

“Richie’s at his house right now, Eddie,” Sonia sighed, emotionally and physically exhausted from the funeral.

“Please,” Eddie whined. “I wanna see him, please!”

“Eddie, no, it’s time for bed,” Sonia responded firmly, standing to leave the room.

“Richie!” Eddie howled, holding the stuffed dog to his chest as he began kicking his legs in a temper tantrum. “I want Richie! Richie! Wanna see Richie!”

“Edward Kaspbrak, that’s enough! It’s time for bed, goodnight!” Sonia shrilled, leaving the room with tears in her eyes as she listened to Eddie wail for Richie, wishing Frank was here to tell her what to do.

“Richie!” Eddie continued to whimper, tears dripping down into Ruffy’s fur. “I want Richie!”

Pushing himself up and out of bed, Eddie decided he would have to

get to Richie on his own, pulling the door to his room open cautiously before peeking out into the hall in search of his mother. Eddie crept through the hallway, hiccupping and hugging Ruffy tightly before descending the stairs and making his way to the kitchen where the phone was.

Sniffling against the snot running down his face, Eddie set Ruffy on the table above him before grabbing a kitchen chair and dragging it towards the phone so he could climb up and dial the Wheelers house.

"Hello?" came Karen's polite greeting after Eddie had expertly dialed the Wheelers' landline. *"Hello?"*

"Richie?" Eddie whimpered, sniffling loudly.

"Eddie?"

"Richie," Eddie whined again, choking on a sob.

" Eddie, what are you doing on the phone so late? Where ' s your mommy? "

"Want Richie! Want Richie! Please! Want Richie!" Eddie began to chant, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"It's late sweetheart," Karen sighed, trying to decide the best course of action. While it was nearly ten o'clock at night and Richie had been asleep for two hours now, the grieving child on the other end of the line was clearly in desperate need of comfort at the moment.

"Please," Eddie whimpered, mouth pressed tightly against the phone.

"*We'll be there in ten minutes, alright sweetheart,"* Karen sighed, eyes squeezed shut and already regretting the decision, knowing Sonia would be furious.

Eddie sat huddled against the front door, Ruffy cradled between his chest and folded knees, as he waited for Richie. *His* Richie.

The doorbell rang, startling the crying boy and making him cry harder as he pushed himself up to open the door, going against all of Sonia's rules.

"Eddie Spaghetti," Richie gasped, letting go of his mother's hand and jumping forward to hug Eddie tightly.

Karen watched as Eddie sobbed into Richie's neck as they held each other tightly.

"Edward Kaspbrak! What is going on?!"

"Sonia-"

"What are you doing here?" Sonia roared as she reached the bottom of the stairs, making Eddie jolt with fear in Richie's arms.

"Eddie called-"

"Edward Kaspbrak! You were supposed to be in bed!"

Eddie peeked up at his mother with scared, watery eyes before burying his face against Richie's neck once again. Richie stood holding his friend and staring up at Sonia with an equally terrified expression.

"I'm sorry, Sonia," Karen apologized, stepping forward. "He was upset and I couldn't just leave him sobbing in your kitchen."

"*Yes*, you could have," Sonia glared. "It's none of your business!"

"Excuse me," Karen scoffed, shocked at Sonia's treatment after all of the support the Wheelers had shown her family in the past few weeks. "Eddie *is* my business and if he comes to me for help, I *will* help him, Sonia!"

Sonia sighed, covering her face with her hands in defeat.

"Please leave," Sonia groaned, voice muffled by her hands.

"But-"

“I *said* get out of my house!”

The two women stood, glaring at one another until Karen deflated.

“Richie,” Karen spoken, eyes focusing on Sonia. “It’s time to go.”

“But mommy-”

“No! No! No!” Eddie howled, clutching his best friend as tight as he could.

“I’m sorry, sweetie,” Karen apologized, tears spring to her own eyes as she turned away from Sonia and crouched down beside the two children. “We have to go, but I promise we’ll see you tomorrow. Alright?”

“No! Richie! No!” Eddie continued to scream, not releasing Richie from his grip.

“Eddie, that’s enough,” Sonia spoke harshly, yanking Eddie back and picking him up into her arms.

“Eddie!” Richie shrieked, reaching out for his flailing and screaming friend. “Mommy, no! I can’t leave him!”

“C’mon, sweetie,” Karen soothed, picking Richie up in a similar fashion and retreating from the house and the sound of a sobbing Eddie.

"Mommy, no," Richie cried. "I need Eddie!"

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Karen whispered, rocking the sobbing child in her arms.

8. Bestest, Favourite Eye-Dental Twin Brother

Notes for the Chapter:

> I'm not super happy with this chapter but we needed some twin interaction...

“Mikey, wanna pway twains?” Richie screamed, running into his brother’s room.

“Yeah, sure!” Mike grinned jumping to his feet to follow Richie down to the basement.

“Awesome,” Richie grinned. “Eddie Spaghetti’s coming over too!”

“Oh,” Mike’s smile faltered.

“C’mon!” Richie grinned, waving for Mike to follow him to the hallway.

“Actually,” Mike frowned. “I wanna colour…”

“Why?” Richie asked, turning to look back at his brother.

Mike shrugged making Richie frown.

“Pwease, Mikey?” Richie whined. “I want you to come pway too!”

“I don’t want to,” Mike shook his head, flopping down onto his stomach and picking up his blue crayon that he had abandoned earlier.

“But why,” Richie groaned, plopping down next to his twin brother.

“Cause you like Eddie better than me,” Mike whispered, pouting down at his colouring book.

“What? No, I don’t!” Richie frowned.

“You always wanna play with him and not me,” Mike pointed out, picking at the corner of his current page and curling sadly.

“That’s a lie,” Richie shouted, quick to anger as the twins always were with one another.

“No!” Mike shouted back, sitting up to glare at his brother.

“Yes, it is!”

“No, it’s not!” Mike screamed, face flushing red. “You hate me and you like Eddie!”

“That’s not true,” Richie screamed back.

“It is!”

“Boys!” Karen shouted over them, making them both stop yelling at one another. “What happened?”

“Mikey’s lying!” Richie whined, pointing at his brother angrily.

“I’m not!” Mike denied. “Richie’s lying!”

“What-” Karen sighed, only to be interrupted by Richie.

“I don’t like Eddie betterer than you!”

“You do!” Mike shouted back. “You never wanna play with me! Just Eddie!”

“Cause Eddie’s nicer to me than you!”

“No, he’s not!”

“Yeah huh,” Richie replied, crossing his arms. “You’re a meany!”

“I’m not,” Mike wailed, bursting into a fit of tears and making Richie’s hard stare falter.

“Mikey,” Richie spoke, eyes welling up with his own tears as he cautiously approached his brother. “I’m sorry, you’re not a meany!”

“You said I am though!” Mike cried, hiccupping dramatically.

“I was mad,” Richie apologized, hugging his brother. “And Miss

always says not to say mean things when you're mad but I did. I'm sorry."

"Okay," Mike hiccupped, hugging his brother back.

"You're supposed to say, 'that's okay', Mikey. Remember?" Richie reminded.

"Oh... That's okay," Mike nodded making Richie smile.

"I promise I don't like Eddie better than you," Richie whispered after a few seconds of silence.

"You don't?"

"No," Richie shook his head. "Eddie's my bestest friend, but you're my eye-dental twin!"

"Then why do you always play with Eddie and not me?" Mike pouts.

"Cause Eddie's daddy just dieded and he's sad a lot and he needs me to pwotect him."

"Protect him?"

"Yeah, like," Richie nodded. "Remember at the stawt of school when you were scared to talk to Miss?"

"I wasn't scared of Miss!" Mike protested with a blush.

"You were," Richie nodded with a smile. "So, I would talk to her for you. I pwotected you."

"That's not true," Mike muttered embarrassedly.

"You're stwong now though… And you have Will! You don't need me to pwotect you."

"Will's my bestest friend," Mike nodded, making Karen smile as she proudly watched the two boys resolve their issue on their own.

"So now I pwotect Eddie 'cause he's sad a-cause of his daddy and needs me to pwotect him," Richie explained making Mike nod in

understanding.

“Okay,” Mike nodded.

“But you’re still my bestest, favourite eye-dental twin bwother,” Richie promised, hugging his brother again.

“You’re my bestest, favourite eye-dental twin brother too, Richie,” Mike grinned into Richie’s shoulder happily.

9. Mommy Lets Me!

Notes for the Chapter:

> it's getting kinda ridiculous but I can't stop and know I won't be able to update as much once my classes start up again tomorrow.

Following Frank's death Eddie spent an increasing amount of time at the Wheelers' house as Karen was unable to leave Eddie with his unstable mother in good conscience.

Richie and Eddie had also become even more reliant on one another. Eddie had taken to frequent bouts of silence, refusing to communicate with anyone other than Richie who acted as his verbal translator in social situations or whenever Eddie was upset. They had also become physically reliant on one another, stealing needy kisses whenever they were alone in a room together.

Following their first kiss in Richie's bed the two had come to realize that while there wasn't anything particularly exciting about pressing their open mouths together, it did make them both feel safe and happy. While they weren't entirely sure why, they had enough awareness to know they shouldn't kiss in front of other people, sticking to engaging in lip-locks in their bedrooms or in the empty coat room after recess.

Despite their best efforts at being sneaky, however, Karen caught on to what was going on pretty quickly. One afternoon, nearly a month after Frank's death, Eddie and Richie found themselves in Richie's bed reading a Spiderman comic Richie had purchased at the comic book store with his brother and father the previous day.

While both were still learning to read, Eddie liked to pretend that he understood much more than he did and often read comics aloud to them. He could typically sound out a couple words every few panels and would piece together his own story to describe the action unfolding in the scenes.

"I love you, Peter," Eddie cried in a high voice, trying to mimic a

female voice as he read out Gwen Stacey and Peter Parker's dialogue.

"You're so silly, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie giggled as Eddie began making kissing noises.

"No, I'm not! They're in love," Eddie laughed back, pointing at the panels showing Peter and Gwen kissing passionately.

"Are we in wuv?" Richie asked bashfully, recalling their kisses.

"That's silly," Eddie shook his head. "We're both boys, we can't be in love!"

"Oh," Richie nodded sadly.

"Don't be sad," Eddie squeaked, reaching out to grab Richie's hand in his. "If I was a girl, I promise I would love you."

"You would?" Richie asked hopefully.

"Of course!" Eddie nodded with a smile. "You're so funny and nice and you always protect me!"

Richie smiled, leaning down to slot his lips over Eddie's. While they hadn't figured out what exactly they were supposed to do when they kissed, they had learned that hugging while their mouths were pressed together was nice.

"Boys, I- Oh!"

Karen stopped in the doorway, staring at the two boys wrapped around each other with the comic spread over their laps.

"Yeah, mommy?" Richie asked, cheeks pink as he pulled back from Eddie, a long string of saliva stretching between their lips until Richie wiped at his slobbery mouth.

"Lunch is ready," Karen laughed shaking her head at the two boys.

From then on, the boys took Karen's flippant reaction to their kiss as the green light to kiss anywhere at any time. Kissing in the coat room after recess turned into openly kissing in front of others on the playground or as they built towers with colourful blocks with Mike and Will.

"No!" Eddie shrieked, his tower tumbling to the ground because it was top-heavy. Eddie's lip bottom lip shook as he pouted at the fallen blocks.

"Timber!" Richie screeched a few seconds late, laughing at himself.

"It's not funny, Rich," Eddie whimpered, thinking that Richie was laughing at him.

"Awe, don't be mad at me, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie laughed, crawling towards Eddie. "Just jokin'!"

"S'not funny," Eddie repeated, frown deepening as he sniffled against the tears growing in his eyes. "I worked really hard on that!"

"Don't cry, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie pouted, reaching forward to wipe one of Eddie's tears away before leaning over to press his lips over Eddie's.

"Richie!" Mike squealed, staring at his brother in shock.

"What Mikey?" Richie asked, pulling away from Eddie and wiping at the saliva on his lips.

"Eddie and you kissed!"

"Yeah," Richie nodded.

"You can't kiss, you're only little kids!" Mike sputtered, voice rising in panic. "Only mommies and daddies kiss!"

"No, mommy lets me kiss Eddie!" Richie fought back, his own voice rising in volume.

"Bet you're lying!"

“Am not,” Richie shouted, face burning with anger.

“You are! You can’t kiss Eddie! It’s not allowed!” Mike fought back, gaining the attention of a few of their classmates and their teacher.

“Richie, Mikey,” their kindergarten teacher Miss. Smith interrupted gently, kneeling between the two boys. “What’s going on?”

“Mikey’s being mean to me!” Richie cried, pointing at his brother angrily.

“I’m not!” Mike protested. “Richie and Eddie kissed!”

“They did?” the teacher asked, eyebrows raising in surprise.

“Yeah, but they’re not allowed. Mommies and daddies only!”

“No!” Richie shouted. “Mommy lets me!”

“She does?” the teacher asked again in surprise.

“She didn’t tell me!” Mike shot back. “So, you’re lying!”

“No, I’m not!” Richie pouted. “Eddie, tell ‘em I’m not lyin’!”

All eyes turned to Eddie expectantly making him curl into himself nervously.

“She sawed us kiss in Richie’s bed,” Eddie spoke quietly. “So, it’s allowed.”

“Ha! See!” Richie grinned triumphantly.

“Wrong! You’re both stupid!”

“Not stupid!” Richie screamed, lunging forward to knock into his brother.

“Hey, hey,” the teacher intervened, separating the seething boys. “No! Time-out for both of you!”

From that point on Richie seemed to kiss Eddie almost out of spite just to prove to Mike he could do whatever he wanted.

“It’s time for snack, Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie grinned, skipping over to Eddie’s desk. “Wanna sit wif me on the weading cawpet?”

“Uh huh,” Eddie grinned making Richie smile and lean over to press a long, open mouthed kiss to Eddie’s face.

They kissed after snack, before recess, after recess and right before they put their coats on while getting ready to go home for the day. Miss. Smith was exasperated with the two to say the least. She had asked them to stop after catching them in an embrace as they stood in line with their class to head into the school after recess, but it only seemed to fuel them further.

“Mrs. Wheeler, can I speak with you for a minute?” Miss. Smith called when she spotted Richie, Eddie and Mike leaving with the woman that afternoon.

“Of course,” Karen smiled.

“Ha, you’re in trouuuble,” Mike teased causing Richie push him angrily as the three ran towards the jungle gym where they waited for Karen.

“Is everything okay?” Karen asked, worried Richie’s was being disruptive again. “Is it Richie? We’ve been working on him raising his hand before speaking-”

“No, it’s not that,” Miss. Smith promised, sighing as she tried to broach the subject. “It’s actually about Richie *and* Eddie...”

“Oh?” Karen responded with surprise.

“I only just noticed the two today, but,” the teacher paused. “I’ve been seeing the two of them… *kissing* quite a lot today.”

“What?” Karen laughed, looking over at the boys where all three

were racing to see who could swing the highest on the swing set.

“Yes,” Miss. Smith laughed uncomfortably. “Actually, they mentioned that you gave them permission and it’s none of my business-”

“What?” Karen laughed again, looking at the teacher in shock. “I did no such thing!”

“Well, I just wanted to make sure you were aware,” Miss. Smith blushed. “I would inform Ms. Kaspbrak myself, but you’ve been picking Eddie up lately…”

“Oh, no,” Karen rushed, imaging the fit Sonia would throw if she found out what the boys had been doing. “I’ll tell Sonia. Thank you for letting me know, though.”

Mrs. Smith nodded before turning to speak to another parent who was picking up their child.

“After dinner, I want you to get started on your reading, alright Michael,” Karen informed as the Wheeler family ate dinner.

“What about Richie and Eddie?” Mike pouted.

“They’re gonna work on their reading too, don’t worry,” Karen promised. “I need to speak to them with daddy first though.”

“Okay,” Mike nodded while Eddie shifted in his seat nervously.

“I’m all done!” Mike announced hopping down from the table and running to the front door to grab his reading homework. Nancy was at Barbra’s for dinner, leaving Richie, Eddie, Karen, and Ted at the table alone.

“Boys,” Karen started, looking to her husband for support. “Do you remember that I spoke to Miss. Smith after school today?”

Both nodded, staring worriedly up at Karen while Ted's eyes focused uncomfortably on his empty plate.

“She told me that you guys were… kissing at school today,” Karen finished gently.

“Eddie was sad so I wanted to make him feel bett-uh,” Richie informed, looking between his parents for support. “Daddy and you kiss when you're sad, mommy.”

“But we’re adults, sweetie,” Karen explained, making Richie’s eyebrows furrow in confusion.

“But,” Richie muttered, trying to make sense of Karen’s words. “I wanna kiss Eddie!”

“Yes, but you’re only little boys,” Karen smiled.

“But you saw us,” Richie pointed out. “Member?”

“Yes,” Karen sighed, shaking her head. “And I should have told you then that you shouldn’t be doing that. Mommy made a mistake.”

“So, I’m not allowed to kiss Eddie?” Richie asked, voice wavering.

“Maybe a kiss on the cheek or a hug, Richie,” Karen explained, not wanting to upset the boy. “But that’s all.”

“S'not fair,” Richie whimpered, fat tears starting to roll down his cheeks as Eddie began to cry as well.

“I’m sorry!” Eddie wailed. “I’m sorry!”

“Eddie, sweetie, it’s okay,” Karen’s eyes widened as she rushed to pull the boy into a hug. He had always been a quite emotional child, constantly anxious that he was in trouble. His meltdowns had increased tenfold since Frank’s death.

“Am I in trouble?” Eddie hiccupped, looking up at Karen with teary eyes.

“No, you’re not in trouble,” Karen promised.

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, pulling away from Karen and curling into himself sadly.

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

> lemme just say, for some reason writing this was a goddamn struggle. I work in Quebec so that means French is typically the default and I started just randomly writing sentences or words in French so many times. I don't know what's wrong with my brain tonight, guess I was still in work mode hahah.
>
> also, love all the feedback I've been getting you guys are all amazing!

"Hello?"

"Sonia, it's Karen," Karen smiled, cradling the phone between her shoulder and ear as she chopped vegetables for dinner.

"Oh, hi," Sonia spoke warily.

"I'm taking the kids school shopping tomorrow and Richie, *of course*, was wondering if you and Eddie would like to join us."

"Eddie has a doctor's appointment," Sonia responded in a flat tone.

"Another one?" Karen asked, setting down the knife in her hand as her eyebrows furrowed.

"Yes, you know he's fragile!" Sonia shrilled defensively.

"Right…" Karen murmured. Although Eddie did have asthma and quite a few allergies, he had never before had so many supposed illnesses as he did the summer before first grade.

Karen had barely seen the boy the whole summer, her only interaction with the boy being helping Richie dial the Kaspbrak's number to ask Eddie if he wanted to play. Almost every time the answer was that Eddie had a doctor's appointment or was sick in bed. Karen was worried to say the least.

“RICHIE!” Eddie squealed, rushing towards his best friend as soon as he spotted the two identically curly heads of hair in the school yard.

“Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie grinned, turning away from his brother and opening his arms for Eddie to run into. “I missed you!”

“Missed ya too, Rich,” Eddie grins, squeezing Richie tightly before moving to hug Mike as well.

“Are you feelin’ better?” Richie asked, taking Eddie’s hand into his own and squeezing it worriedly.

“Yeah, I think so?” Eddie nodded, answer coming out as more of a question. “I feel the same, I think.”

“What?”

“I dunno,” Eddie shrugged, chin tucking to his chest embarrassedly. “I just feel the same as I did before I had to go to all the doctors…”

“That’s weird,” Mike muttered, Richie and Eddie nodding along in agreement.

“Oh, well,” Richie cried, trying to change the subject. “I'm happy to see you!”

“Me too,” Eddie nodded, smiling widely at Richie as Richie pulled him into another hug.

“Oof,” Richie suddenly stumbled into Eddie as he was shoved from behind.

“Gaylords,” a taller boy snickered to his friend as they walked past.

“Hey!” Richie called, angry that he had been pushed. “You’re not ah-posed to push!”

The two boys stopped, smiling to each other before doubling back towards the three boys.

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah, it’s mean!” Richie nodded, Mike and Eddie standing nervous and silent behind him.

“I'll do what I want, flamer,” the taller boy with a shaggy haircut barked, shoving Richie’s chest until he tumbled backwards, knocking his brother over as well.

“You okay, guys?” Eddie asked with worry, crouching down to check the twins for injuries while avoiding getting any dirt on his new school clothes.

“M'okay,” Richie grumbled, glaring at the retreating forms of the two bullies.

“Hey, Rich,” Eddie murmured as they sat next to each other in the Reading Corner of their first-grade class.

“Yeah?” Richie asked, not looking up from his book.

“Do you know what it means? What those boys called us this morning?”

“Nuh uh,” Richie shook his head, attention already shifting to the toy dinosaurs he could see poking out of a bucket in the shelf next to him.

“Mommy?” Eddie asked as he picked at his broccoli that night.

“Yes, Eddie Bear?” Sonia asked, looking up from her own food.

“What does a Gaylord mean?” Eddie asked innocently, causing Sonia to choke on her food.

“Edward Kaspbrak, how dare you use that kind of language!” Sonia shrieked, face flushing red.

“I’m sorry,” Eddie squeaked. “I just don’t know what it means.”

“Where did you hear that? Was it Richie?”

“No, Richie doesn’t say bad words,” Eddie shook his head vehemently. “Some mean boys called it to us today on the playground.”

“Well, believe me, it’s not true,” Sonia rushed, shaking her head and focusing on her plate. “No son of mine!”

“Ok, mommy,” Eddie nodded, frowning at his broccoli in confusion but not wanting to push the subject further and get yelled at.

11. Emphysema

“Hi mommy,” Mike grinned, hugging his mother as he reached her vehicle with his brother.

“Hi sweetie,” Karen smiles. “How was school?”

“Good,” Mike nodded, dropping to his knees to begin digging through his overstuffed backpack. “Will and I drawed a new story, wanna see?”

“Why don’t we wait until we get home, Mikey?” Karen laughed, picking up the extra shirt and pack of crayons that had flown from Mike’s bag.

“Oh, okay,” Mike nodded, zipping up his bag and climbing into the backseat of the car.

“Hi, sweetie,” Karen smiled, turning to Richie. “Where’s Eddie?”

“Doctors,” Richie shrugged, following his brother into the backseat. The boys were six months into the first grade and Eddie had yet to attend a full week of school always taking part of the week off for an appointment of some kind.

“Sick again?”

Richie shrugged again, buckling his seatbelt with a pout.

“*Hello?”*

“Sonia, it’s Karen,” Karen spoke into the phone, watching the twins giggle along to the Flintstones in the other room.

“*Oh, hi,*” Sonia’s polite tone dropping immediately.

“Hi,” Karen repeated nervously. “Um, I just wanted to check and make sure Eddie’s okay.”

“*Oh, he’s not doing well,*” Sonia whined. “*I think it might be*

emphysema."

"Emphysema?"

"Oh, yes" Sonia continued. *"His coughing and breathing all point to it. I haven't found a doctor who'll treat him for it yet. Stupid bastards!"*

"But," Karen started, eyebrows scrunched in confusion. "He has asthma… that's why he breathes that way sometimes."

" He has both! " Sonia shrieked. " Asthma increases his likelihood- "

"But Sonia," Karen interrupted. "His breathing's been *fine* lately."

"You're not with him at night, Karen," Sonia shrilled. *"My poor baby can barely breathe!"*

"Sonia…" Karen paused trying to organize her thoughts. "Eddie's been missing a lot of school…"

"He has a lot of appointments," Sonia answered. "*He's a very sick little boy-"*

"Other than his allergies and asthma he seems fine though, Sonia." Karen interrupted. "Whenever he's here he's fine."

"*Don't you tell me how to parent my son, Karen,"* Sonia shrieked. "*As bad as all those nurses!"*

"Sonia, I'm not-"

"*It's none of your business!"*

"I just want to make sure Eddie's safe," Karen answered, temper rising. "Ever since Frank-"

"*Don't you dare try to act like I can't parent my son because my husband passed away,"* Sonia screamed down the line making Karen wince.

"Sonia, I think you need help-"

"*Do not call here again,"* Sonia hissed angrily. "*Eddie will no longer be spending time with your family!"*

“Crazy bitch,” Karen shook her head as she hung up the phone after Sonia ended the call. Sonia had no chance of trying to keep Eddie and Richie from each other.

“Mommy, please!” Eddie wailed, clutching Richie in the school parking lot as he begged his mother to allow him to go home with the Wheelers.

“Please, Mrs. Kasp-bwak! Please!”

“Edward, that’s enough!” Sonia growled, grabbing Eddie’s bicep and pulling him away from Richie.

“Ow, mommy!” Eddie cried, stumbling backward towards Sonia’s car as she twisted his arm. “No!”

“Eddie!” Richie cried, chasing after them. “You’re hurting him! You’re hurting him!”

Richie clutched Eddie’s other arm, pulling on it insistently.

“Richie, let him go,” Karen sighed, moving forward to scoop up her angry son.

“You’re a mean mommy,” Richie shouted over at Sonia, face scrunched in anger. “Mommy’s aren’t a-posed to hurt kids!”

“You little brat!” Sonia shrieked, slamming the door to her car closed once Eddie was safely inside. “How dare you-”

“Don’t you yell at my son, Sonia!” Karen glared.

“He’s a little-”

“You’re mean! I hate you! I hate you!”

“Is everything okay?” asked another mother watching from a nearby car.

“Everything’s *fine*,” Sonia hissed before storming around the car and sliding into the drivers’ seat before peeling angrily out of the school

parking lot.

“She took Eddie, mommy,” Richie cried, hugging his mother. “She won’t let me play with him.”

“It’s okay, Richie,” Karen soothed, rocking her son with a glare at Sonia’s retreating vehicle. “It’s going to be okay, I promise.”

12. A Polo

“Why?” Eddie sobbed, clinging to Richie’s neck as their teachers attempted to forcibly separate the two boys clinging to each other in the hallway of Hawkins’ Elementary.

“Because it’s time for class to start, Eddie,” Mrs. Johnson, Eddie’s second grade teacher explained gently.

“No!” Eddie wailed again.

It was the first day of second grade and for the first time in their school careers Eddie and Richie were in separate classes.

“Eddie-”

“Wanna be with Richie!”

“I’m not leavin’ him!” Richie agreed.

“Boys,” Miss. Williams sighed, exhausted by with the whole situation. “You’ll still see each other at recess and the second-grade classes do a lot of activities together-”

“Wanna stay with Richie!” Eddie screamed, gaining the attention of several others in the hallway. Eddie was usually quiet and almost overly polite, making the outburst shocking to both educators.

Eventually the two were sent to the Principal’s office to be dealt with as neither teacher could separate the two.

“What’s going on?” Sonia wailed as she entered the office, Karen hot on her heels.

“Mr. Eddie and Mr. Richie here are apparently *unhappy* with their class assignments,” the principal explained with faint amusement.

“What do you mean?” Sonia asked as she moved to hover over Eddie,

checking him for signs of disease or injury.

“Mrs. Kaspbrak, I know you requested the two be separated-”

“What?” Karen asked, eyebrows raised in surprise.

“Eddie’s been acting out and I think it’s because of Richie’s influence,” Sonia sniffed haughtily.

“That’s ridiculous!”

“Either way,” the principal interrupted warily. “We need to come to an agreement so both boys don’t miss any more of their first day.”

“Richie,” Karen sighed, squatting down next to her son. “I know you’re upset, but you have to go to your classroom.”

“But, Eddie-”

“Eddie’ll be just across the hall,” Karen stopped the pouting boy, smoothing his curls back. “You’ll still see him lots,” Karen promised making Sonia scoff in annoyance.

“Okay,” Richie whimpered, looking over at his best friend sadly.

“Nooooo!” Eddie wailed, throwing his head back and crying.

“Eddie, that’s enough,” Sonia chided. “Why are you acting like this? Are you sick? Do we need to take you to see Dr. Handor?”

Eddie quieted immediately, shaking his head with wide eyes as silent tears continued to stream down his cheeks.

“No, please, no,” Eddie whimpered, sniffling through his snotty nose.

“Sonia-” Karen protested, appalled that Sonia would threaten Eddie with a doctors appointment.

“I’ve wasted more than enough of my time here today,” Sonia sniffed. “Get to class, Edward.”

“Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie shrieked, barrelling into his best friend who

was standing just outside the doors to the school, waiting for Richie's class to come outside for recess.

"Richie!" Eddie screamed back happily, hugging Richie tightly.

"How's your class?" Richie asked, smiling down at his best friend.

"Bad," Eddie shrugged, rocking back on his heels sadly. "Wanna be in your class…"

"I'm sorry we're not together, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie apologized sadly, grasping Eddie's shoulder. The sound of an awkward cough reminded Richie of the news he had to share with Eddie. "Oh, yeah, Eddie Spaghetti, this is Stanley!"

Eddie peered over at the curly haired boy Richie pointed to with a frown.

"Hello," Stan waved, toes pigeon-footing inwardly in discomfort.

"Hi," Eddie squeaked, staring at the other boy worriedly.

"Stanley's in my class," Richie explained. "He's our new friend!"

"Oh," Eddie mumbled, heart sinking with the knowledge that Richie was making other friends to replace him.

"And Eddie Spaghetti is my bestest friend ever!" Richie explained to Stan, stepping behind Eddie and wrapping his arms around Eddie's middle before rubbing his cheek against Eddie's with a bright smile.

"It's nice to meet you Eddie… Spaghetti?" Stan replied confusedly.

"Just Eddie," Eddie squeaked back, not liking the way the nickname sounded in another person's mouth.

"Okay," Stan nodded.

"Great!" Richie grinned still hugging Eddie's middle. "Now, to the sandbox!" he cried before running towards the sandbox, dragging Eddie behind him.

From that point forward, Stanley became a permanent fixture at recess. Although it annoyed Eddie to have to share Richie with others at school, he had grudgingly accepted it. It was only when Richie had invited Stanley over to play with them one weekend in October that Eddie had had enough.

“I’m hungry,” Eddie moaned as they played their third round of snakes and ladders.

“I’ll go ask mommy when lunch’ll be ready,” Richie responded, jumping up from his spot and sending their game flying.

“Richie!” Stan groaned.

“Sorry,” Richie apologized half-heartedly. Eddie had lost the last two games to the others and was on his way to another loss that Richie wanted to avoid. “New game! Be right back!”

Stanley and Eddie quietly reset the game as they waited for Richie to return, both avoiding each other’s eyes shyly.

“Hey, Stanley?”

“Yeah,” Stan replied, focusing on ordering the game pieces up in a straight line.

“Do you know Richie has polio?” Eddie asked innocently.

“Huh?” Stanley grunted, looking up at Eddie with scrunched eyebrows. “What’s that?”

“You don’t know what polio is?” Eddie gasped in a surprisingly convincing tone.

“No,” Stan mumbled worriedly.

“It’s a super deadly disease,” Eddie explained seriously. “Anyone who is near him too much gets it and *dies*.”

“Wh-what?” Stan’s eyes widened comically, lip trembling with fright.

“Mhmm,” Eddie continued with his lie. “He doesn’t tell people because then they won’t be his friend, but if people play with him a lot they get it and die!”

“Really?” Stan moaned.

“Uh huh,” Eddie nodded. “The doctor made some medicines for me and his mommy and daddy and Mikey and Nancy, so we won’t die but other peoples gets super sick and dies.”

“But, but,” Stan spluttered. “Why is he allowed at school? He could kill all the kids!”

“It’s illegal for a kid not to go to school,” Eddie shrugged. His story had obviously plot holes and impossibilities, but seven-year-old Stan didn’t catch any of them.

“Mommy said mac n’ cheese is ready!” Richie screamed gleefully as he ran into the room, finding an innocent looking Eddie and Stan who was almost in tears.

“Yummy,” Eddie smiled, jumping up to take Richie’s hand.

“I wanna go home,” Stan told them quietly, unable to meet their eyes.

“What? Why?” Richie asked. “My mommy cooked mac n’ cheese!”

“I need to leave,” Stan repeated, shaking his head. “I need to call my house.”

“Okay,” Richie frowned, looking over at Eddie for an explanation and receiving a shrug.

“Bye, Stanley,” Richie waved from the doorway with Eddie and Karen as Stan followed his mother down the driveway to their car. “See ya at school!”

Karen shut the door and the two boys followed her into the kitchen for lunch, hands clasped between them and Richie frowning sadly.

“Wonder why Stanley wanted to go home,” Richie mused as he climbed up into a kitchen chair across from his brother who was already eating his food with a large spoon.

“Dunno,” Eddie shrugged, stomach churning guiltily. He felt bad scaring Stan away, but he was stealing Eddie’s best friend. Richie was *his*.

“Stanley!” Richie called as he and Eddie walked across the playground towards where Stanley was waiting for the school bell to ring. “Hey!”

Richie watched as Stan’s eyes widened and he turned away from them, walking towards a teacher and speaking to them before going into the school. Richie’s waving hand fell to his side and a frown graced his lips.

“Hey, Rich,” Eddie spoke up, grabbing at Richie’s arm to get his attention. “Wanna play on the swings at recess later?”

“’Yeah, sure, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie nodded, still frowning in the direction of the door Stan had disappeared through.

“Hey, Stanley,” Richie grinned, sitting down next to the other boy on the reading carpet with a book in his hands. “Wanna be my reading partner?”

“Um, no,” Stan shook his head, moving to stand and run away from Richie. “Sorry.”

“Wait, Stanley,” Richie frowned, reaching out to grab Stan’s arm.

“No!” Stan shrieked, ripping his arm from Richie’s grasp and running towards their teacher in tears, asking to go use the bathroom.

“Stanley, hey, wait,” Richie called, chasing Stanley down the school hallway after asking Miss. Williams if he could also use the

bathroom.

“Please leave me alone, Richie,” Stanley cried as Richie burst into the bathroom to find Stan rubbing soap into his forearm. “I don’t want to get sick!”

“What?”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t be your friend,” Stanley apologized. “I don’t wanna die!”

“Why would you die?” Richie asked, stepping towards Stan with confusion written all over his face.

“Because of your polo!” Stanley cried as if it was obvious.

“My polo?” Richie asked. “What’s a polo?”

“Your disease!” Stanley answered. “Polo! Eddie told me about it!”

“What?” Richie repeated. “I don’t have a disease! Do I…?”

“Eddie told me,” Stanley frowned, sudsy arm dropping to his side.

“Hey, Rich,” Eddie grinned, running towards him on the playground and grabbing Richie’s slightly sticky hand to swing it happily between them. “Ready to-”

“Do I have a polo?” Richie interrupted.

“Huh?”

“You told Stanley I have a polo,” Richie explained. “Do I, have it?”

“Oh, you mean polio,” Eddie sighed, stomach flipping nervously.

“Whatever,” Richie groaned, clearly worried. “Do I?”

“No, Rich, you don’t,” Eddie shook his head, looking up at his best friend sadly.

“Then why did you tell Stan I have it?” Richie asked, face full of hurt and confusion as he pulled his hand from Eddie’s grasp.

“Be-because,” Eddie spluttered, breathing picking up as he began to panic.

Richie hates me! Richie hates me! Richie hates me! Richie hates me! Eddie’s brain screamed at him.

“I’m sorry,” Eddie wailed, fat tears rolling down his round cheeks. “I’m sorry! Please don’t hate me, Rich! I’m sorry!”

“Why did you do it though, Eddie Spaghetti?” Richie asked, placing a hand on Eddie’s shoulder worriedly.

“I didn’t want you to be his friend a-anymore,” Eddie hiccupped, tears still falling as his dug his toe into the dirt beneath their feet. “Y-you’re *my* fr-friend! I th-thought he wouldn’t want to be y-you’re friend if he thought you would get him s-sick.”

“You’re both my friends,” Richie explained quietly.

“But you’re *my* friend!” Eddie whined.

“Yeah, you’re my *bestest ever* friend,” Richie nodded. “But Stanley’s also my friend now.”

“But if you’re his friend,” Eddie whispered. “They you won’t want to be my friend anymore.”

“What?” Richie laughed. “That’s not true!”

“It *is*,” Eddie whined. “Stanley’s so funner than me and if he’s around you won’t want to play with me.”

“Eddie, you’re the funnest person ever,” Richie told him seriously. “You’ll *always* be my funnest friend. Just because we have other friends doesn’t mean we aren’t the bestest, funnest friends.”

“You promise?” Eddie asked in a quiet and sad voice, lip wobbling.

“I promise, promise,” Richie nodded before pulling Eddie into a tight

hug.

“M’kay,” Eddie murmured, wrapping his arms around Richie’s back.

13. Cast Twins

Notes for the Chapter:

> im procrastinating writing stranger twins 2 because I dont want it to end so have some baby reddie

“Please, mommy!”

“Eddie, that’s enough,” Sonia groaned, turning the volume on the television up enough to drown out Eddie’s whining and begging.

“But Richie *and* Mikey are both getting bicycles,” Eddie moaned, slapping a hand down on the couch cushion between them in anger. “Why can’t I? I want one so, so, so, so, so, so, so, so-”

“You’re seconds away from being sent to your room for the rest of the evening,” Sonia warned, not looking away from the television.

“-*bad*,” Eddie whispered grumpily, twisting away from his mother and turning to glare at the television with his arms crossed over his chest.

Sonia let out a sigh of relief as Eddie finally fell quiet, refocusing on the Wheel of Fortune puzzle being solved on the television.

“But you didn’t give me a reason-”

“Bed! Now!” Sonia roared, patience entirely gone.

“Just tell me why!” Eddie cried, jumping to his feet. “Why can’t I-”

“Because Eddie, you’ll fall and cut yourself and it’ll get infected and then you’ll be in the hospital-” Sonia rambled worriedly. “Oh, maybe we should make an appointment with Handor for tomorrow, just to be sure-”

“No, no,” Eddie shook his head quickly. “I’m fine. I promise.”

“But your cough-”

“I’m okay, mommy,” Eddie shook his head, eyes wide and the subject of getting a bicycle completely forgotten.

Mikey asked for blue,” Richie explained, as he led Eddie towards the garage where Mike was waiting with their bikes. “But I asked for red.”

“But red’s *my* favourite colour,” Eddie pouted, upset that Richie was allowed to get a bike in his favourite colour but Eddie wasn’t.

“Yeah, that’s why I got it,” Richie answered with his own frown. “Are you mad at me, Eddie Spaghetti? I just wanted to get one you’d like too since your mommy won’t let you get one. But you can try mine!”

“Oh,” Eddie squeaked, heart racing in excitement. “Okay!”

“Ready?” Richie grinned, happy Eddie wasn’t upset with him, as they turned the corner. “Ta-da!”

“Woah!” Eddie gasped, rushing towards the shiny red bike with a banana seat. “It’s awesome!”

“I know!”

“Wow,” Eddie whispered again to himself, eyes scanning the gears of the bike as his fingers smoothed over the leather of the bike seat.

“Wanna turn?” Richie asked, pushing up the bike’s kickstand and wheeling it out of the garage as Eddie and Mike followed, Mike pushing his own bike.

“Yeah!” Eddie cheered, skipping excitedly as he followed Richie out into the sunny Saturday afternoon.

“Okay,” Richie smiled over at Eddie, stepping back from the bike and holding one handle to keep it upright, waiting for Eddie to climb on.

“Oh, I,” Eddie paused, one hand on the other handlebar. “I don’t know how…”

“Oh, right,” Richie frowned. “Um… I know! We can ride doubles!”

“What’s doubles?”

“I’ll peddle and stuff and you can sit on the back of the seat,” Richie explained, mounting his bike excitedly. “Like the sixth graders do. ‘Member?”

“Yeah,” Eddie nodded, chewing his lip nervously as he considered climbing onto the back of Richie’s bike, thinking about what his mother said would happen if he rode a bike. “Um… Okay, yeah, sure!”

“Hop on, Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie grinned, scooting forward enough for Eddie to squeeze onto the back of the bike.

“Richie,” Mike called wearily, watching as Eddie tried to climb onto the back of Richie’s bike while Richie held it still. “That’s a bad idea.”

“No it's not, Mikey!” Richie laughed shaking his head. “Ready, Eddie?”

“Uh huh,” Eddie squeaked, fingers fisting into the back of Richie’s shirt.

“Here, we gooooo,” Richie cried, pushing off of the ground. “Woah, oh-”

“Richie!”

“No!”

Richie’s bike wobbled beneath their weight, pitching to the left due to Eddie's added weight and their collective inability to balance themselves.

Mike jumped from his bike, throwing it to the ground as both boys began wailing on the ground, the large bike resting on top of them. He hefted the bike off their smaller bodies where they lay next to one another sobbing.

“Are, are you okay?” Mike asked frantically, tears spring to his own eyes.

Eddie's screams only got higher in pitch and Richie began writhing around in pain, clutching his arm to his chest, scaring Mike.

"I'm, I'm gonna go get mom," Mike choked through his tears. "Don't move!"

Neither boy responded, both continuing to scream and cry.

"What, oh, my God," Karen gasped as Mike pulled her out onto the front step. "What happened?"

"Richie and Eddie were, were ridin' doubles and then they fell 'cause, 'cause," Mike rambled as he followed Karen down the driveway. "'Cause Richie's still learnin' and I told him, *I told him* not to but he did anyway-"

"Richie, sweetie," Karen reached out for her son, kneeling between the two sobbing boys on the hot pavement.

"It hurts!" Richie wailed, laying on his back and cradling his arm to his chest protectively. "It hurts, mommy!"

Karen glanced to her right, ears ringing with Eddie's deafening screech. She winced as she took in the awkward angle Eddie's own arm was laying at as the smaller boy lay perfectly still and screamed his lungs out.

"Okay, okay," Karen spoke to herself trying to collect her thoughts. "Mikey, sweetheart, get in the car please. In Nancy's seat."

"M'kay," Mike nodded before sprinting off towards his mother's car.

"Okay, Richie, Eddie," she spoke in a loud voice so they could both hear her. Eddie quietened slightly, looking over at the woman. "I'm gonna get you both in the car and we're gonna go to the hospital to get your arms looked at, okay."

"No!" Eddie shrieked, beginning to scream again. All he could think about was the fact that he was in pain and his mother had been right!

“I’m sorry, sweetie,” Karen sighed, placing a hand on his knee. “I know, I know you don’t want to but we need to make sure your arm’s okay. It’ll be alright.”

Karen sped down the road to the hospital after dropping off a tearful Mike at the Hollands’ house to stay with them and his sister until his dad got home from work.

“How’s it going boys?” Karen asked, eyes flickering to the rear-view mirror to look back at the two boys who were curled towards one another, a perfect mirror of each other as they both cradled their arms to their chests. Eddie had stopped screaming and had settled on an almost constant whimper as Richie sniffled and cried fat tears.

“Bad,” Richie whispered, curling further into himself and nudging his face against Eddie’s slightly. “Hurts.”

“We’re almost there,” Karen promised, hands jittery from the adrenaline that had been rushing through her system.

“Take a seat?” Karen squawked as the receptionist instructed informed them that there was a line. “I have two children with broken arms and you want me to just *take a seat*?!”

“Ma’am,” the receptionist sighed, clearly used to being yelled at because of wait times. “We just admitted two heart attack cases, a stroke, and a drug overdose. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but we aren’t the biggest hospital in the world and we’re a little tied up right now. I’m gonna get a nurse to bring them something for the pain, but you’re gonna have to wait to see a doctor for a bit. I’m sorry.”

“Ridiculous,” Karen huffed before turning to stomp towards the boys who had squished themselves onto a single armchair in the waiting room. She knew if she wasn’t so panicked she would have understood, but right now all she could think about was making sure her boys were safe.

“Do you want me to call your mother, Eddie?” Karen asked, stroking her fingers through Richie’s curls as she sat in the chair next to him.

“No,” Eddie whimpered, wriggling closer towards Richie.

A nurse had given them both some pain medication, dulling the throbbing pain in both of their arms but it was still present enough to make them uncomfortable.

“Want my daddy,” Eddie huffed before tears began rushing down his face. “I want my daddy!”

Karen blinked down at Eddie in surprise, shocked at the sudden waterworks and the fact that he was crying for Frank. Karen hadn’t heard the small boy bring his late father up in at least a year and a half, likely due to his mother’s influence.

“Please,” Eddie cried. “I want my daddy!”

“Sweetheart,” Karen sighed, throat constricting with the onslaught of tears she was holding back now. “I’m sorry, I wish-”

“Daddy!” Eddie let out a heart wrenching cry, cutting Karen off.

“I see the moon, the moon sees me,” Richie began singing in a soft voice, quiet enough for only the three of them to hear. *“God bless the moon and God bless me*.”

Karen watched with interest as Eddie began to settle down slightly, hiccupping and wriggling in the chair next Richie as he tried to get closer to him while Richie sang verses of a song that Karen didn’t know.

“I see the stars, the stars see me,” Richie continued, resting his head on Eddie’s as Eddie snuggled into Richie’s neck, carefully avoiding jostling their arms too much. “*God bless the stars and God bless me*.”

Karen smiled slightly as Eddie began humming along with Richie quietly, body jumping violently each time he hiccupped.

“I know an angel watches over me,” Richie sang and Eddie joined him for this verse in the tiniest voice Karen had ever heard. *“God bless the angels and God bless me*.”

“Where is my son!” Karen winced as she heard the commotion that could only be Sonia Kaspbrak in the hallway outside the examination room they had been ushered in to not long ago. Karen had asked the receptionist to call Eddie’s mother while they were getting the boys’ x-rays done. “Where is he!”

Karen smiled sadly at Eddie whose head drooped at the sound of Sonia’s voice, cheek moving to rest sadly on Riche’s shoulder as they swung their short legs back and forth over the edge of the hospital bed.

“Eddie!” Sonia shrieked as she burst into the room. “Oh, my baby!”

“Careful,” Karen warned as Sonia moved forward to hug Eddie. “His arm!”

“I *know*,” Sonia glared over her shoulder at Karen before turning to inspect her son for other injuries, frowning as she took in the scrapes that covered Eddie’s palms and knees from their fall. “Oh, my baby!”

“Hey!” Richie grinned as he jumped down from the hospital bed he had been sitting on with Eddie. “We’re like twins now!”

“You already have a twin,” Eddie reminded him.

“I can have two twins,” Richie shrugged, pressing the length of his white plaster cast to Eddie’s. “A identical twin and a cast twin!”

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, giggling happily.

“C’mon Eddie,” Sonia sighed, grabbing Eddie’s good arm and dragging him towards the door. “We need to get you home and in bed.”

“But-”

“No, buts,” Sonia shrilled, making Karen shake her head as her and Richie trailed the Kaspbrak’s out of the hospital, listening to the woman lecture her son.

“And I told you, I *told* you: no bikes! But what did you do, got on one of those death traps anyway!”

“But mommy-”

“What if you get a bone infection!” Sonia interrupted, not letting him get a word in edge wise as they approached Sonia’s car. “Or what if a splinter of your bone got into your bloodstream?! I need to make an appointment with Dr. Handor when we get home. I saw it on the television, it goes straight to your heart and you go into heart failure!”

“Bye Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie screamed across the small distance between their cars making Eddie jump in surprise. He looked up and over at Richie, the terrified look on his face melting into an easy smile as he waved back at his best friend. Well, at least if he was going to die of heart failure he was going to get to do as Richie’s cast twin.

"Richie?"

"Yeah?" Richie asked, turning his attention from the window and looking up at his mother from his spot in the back seat.

"What was that song you and Eddie were singing at the hospital?" Karen asked curiously. She had been thinking about it ever since, thing about how sweet and peaceful the two looked while singing together.

"Oh, that's Eddie's song with his dad," Richie explained, turning to look out the window again as Karen took a left onto their street.

"His song?"

"Yeah, his daddy used to sing it to him when he was sad," Richie nodded. "Before he... before he died."

"Oh," Karen smiled sadly at her son who was frowning slightly. "Did Eddie teach you it?"

"No," Richie shook his head, face turning red with obvious upset. "His daddy teached me it."

"When?" Karen asked, raising her eyebrow curiously as they pulled into the driveway.

"Once when I was sleeping over," Richie told her, turning to look down at his hands in his lap. "Eddie sometimes has bad dreams," Richie whispered and Karen nodded, aware of the nightmares the boy frequently had. "And his daddy used to sing it for him when he had bad dreams and I was there one time and he taught me."

"And you still remember it?" Karen asked with surprise. Frank had passed when they were only six.

"Yeah," Richie nodded. "We used to sing it a lot when he died. It made Eddie stop crying."

"Oh," Karen nodded in understanding.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I don't actually know anything about American ER wait times since I'm Canadian but honestly they're the worst here. Like yay universal healthcare but goddamn you're gonna die in the waiting room or hallway before you actually get in to see a doctor.
>
> I tried to do some research about wait times in the midwest in the 1970s but surprisingly enough not that much came back...
>
> BTW they're 8 in this. I know Eddie acts a little immature in this at the hospital but like he's terrified and in pain and he's kinda been through some shit so... when Stranger Twins universe Eddie is under

stress he just fuckin regresses, like BYE

14. Eds

“Hey, Ed,” Bill called, chasing Eddie and Richie down the hall from his Math class.

“Oh, hey Bill,” Eddie smiled as Bill fell in line next to them.

'Ed?' Richie thought to himself jealously. *'Since when does Bill call him Ed?'*

“D-d-id you fuh-fuh-finish Harrison’s history assignment yuh-yet?” Bill asked as Richie frowned at his feet, dwelling jealously on Bill using a nickname for Eddie.

“No, I’m going to the library to work on it after school if you want to join,” Eddie smiled.

“Sh-sh-sure, thing,” Bill nodded. “Gotta guh-get t-t-to English, but I’ll s-see you luh-later?”

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, waving as Bill took off.

“Since when are you and stuttering Bill such good friends?” Richie grumbled as they made their way to their shared Science class.

“What do you mean?” Eddie laughed, looking up at a frowning Richie. “We have a lot of classes together,” Eddie shrugged.

“And he calls you Ed?”

“Yeah,” Eddie nodded as he smiled confusedly at Richie’s cold demeanour.

“Huh,” Richie nodded, shoving his hands into his pockets.

“Is that a bad thing?”

Richie shrugged in response, looking away from Eddie as his eyes scanned the hallways disinterestedly.

“Rich?”

“What?”

“Are you mad at me?” Eddie asked, lips curled into a nervous smile.

“Mad? Why would I be mad?” Richie lied unconvincingly.

“About Bill?” Eddie guessed. “I dunno. That’s why I’m asking you!”

“Just didn’t know you guys were so close you were using nicknames,” Richie shrugged, trying to appear unaffected.

“Lots of people call me Ed, Rich,” Eddie sighed.

“But why?” Richie whined. "Eddie's already a nickname."

“You call me Eddie Spaghetti,” Eddie laughed.

“But, *I’m* your best friend,” Richie answered.

“Well, we’re almost in middle school,” Eddie responded, “Eddie’s kinda a baby-ish name. I dunno, Ed is just a bit more… grown up?”

Richie hummed, not convinced by Eddie’s explanation in the slightest.

“Hey Ed,” Ben from their Social Studies class called, approaching Eddie and Richie who were at Eddie’s locker gathering his things before heading home. “Here are those notes I said I’d give you since you missed math last week.”

“Thanks, Ben,” Eddie sighed, taking the notes with a smile. “You’re a life saver!”

“No problem,” Ben smiled back. “See ya!”

Richie groaned to himself as Ben took off down the hallway. It was like the universe was mocking him. All week all he had heard was people calling *his* best friend *Ed*. It was driving him insane.

Richie had also used the shortened nickname every once and a while,

but now that he knew it was so commonplace for their classmates to use he was completely uninterested in using it ever again.

"Hey, *Eds*!" Richie screeched, hunching over Eddie from behind and blowing a raspberry against the ticklish skin of his neck.

"Rich!" Eddie squealed with a laugh, pushing his best friend's head away from him.

"Whatcha working on, *Eds*?" Richie asked, sliding into the seat across the cafeteria table from Eddie and Bill who were sharing notes.

"History," they both groaned together.

"That sucks, *Eds*," Richie nodded, trying to get Eddie to notice the use of the new nickname he had created that set himself apart from his classmates.

"Yeah," Eddie agreed, turning back to his notebook.

"Can I have some of your chips, *Eds*?"

"Yeah, sure," Eddie nodded, pushing his tray towards Richie without looking up from his notebook, making Richie groan.

"So, *Eds*," Richie tried again, his friend only responding with a distracted grunt. "Hey, *Eds*! Eds, Eds, Eds, Eds, Eds-"

"Richie!" Eddie groaned. "God, what do you want? Stop calling my name- Wait. Eds?"

"What?" Richie shrugged, stuffing a couple of Eddie's potato chips in his mouth, trying to act as though he hadn't just been trying to get Eddie to notice him calling him Eds.

"Since when do you call me- Oh, Rich," Eddie laughed, shaking his head with amusement. "Is this because everyone calls me Ed? Were you jealous?"

“No,” Richie muttered, cheeks turning pink as Bill looked up at him curiously.

“It is *so*,” Eddie grinned.

“S’not,” Richie whined dramatically.

“Okay, Rich,” Eddie smiled, shaking his head at his best friend as his stomach flipped pleasantly at the fact that Richie felt the need to make Eddie's nickname his own. “Whatever you say.”

Notes for the Chapter:

and so Eds was born...

15. Jaws

Summary for the Chapter:

they're 11-12 in this one...

“Mom?”

“Yes, Mikey?” Karen asked, turning away from Richie who was monopolizing a majority of the dinner table conversation, and focusing on her quieter son.

“Can I have a sleepover this weekend?” Mike asked, chewing his lip nervously.

“Of course, sweetie,” Karen smiled, ecstatic that Mike was showing an interest in being more social. “That sounds like a good idea, doesn’t it Ted?”

“Yeah,” Ted nodded, equally pleased that Mike had friends. “Sounds great!”

“Who did you want to have over, sweetheart?”

“Um,” Mike looked down at his plate, unnecessarily embarrassed at all of the attention being on him as he swung his legs beneath the table. “Will and Lucas and Dustin.”

“Can my friends come too?” Richie asked excitedly.

“Another weekend, Richie,” Karen shook her head. “You have your friends over all the time. It’s Mikey’s turn.”

“But,” Richie pouted, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms over his chest. “That’s not fair!”

“Ted?” Karen looked to her husband for support.

“That’s enough, Richard,” Ted sighed. “You can have your friends over another time.”

“This is stupid!” Richie grunted, kicking his heels petulantly against the kitchen chair.

“Richard,” Ted offered in a warning tone. “Another word and you won’t be having any friends over for a month.”

Richie’s harrumphed angrily but kept his mouth closed.

“So, this is the Player’s Handbook, this is the Dungeon Master’s Guide, and this is the Monster Manual,” Dustin explained, pulling all three hardcover books from his backpack and dropping them in the middle of the circle they had created in the Wheelers’ basement.

“How do we start?” Will asked, picking up the Monster Manual and flipping through it to inspect the impressive drawings.

“Well, first we all need characters and we need to choose a Dungeon Master,” Dustin answered. “So, we can probably start playing next weekend once we’re all ready.”

“*Next* weekend?” Lucas sighed, eyeing Dustin exasperatedly.

“Yeah, it’s a complex game, Lucas,” Dustin rolled his eyes. “That’s why only the smartest of smart people play. Now, Will, first we need to figure out your ability score.”

Richie sighed, legs swinging as he sat on a kitchen barstool impatiently listening to Mike’s friends giggling happily in the basement as they yelled at one another over a game. He perked up at the sound of the doorbell ringing out, signalling Eddie’s arrival.

Richie had spent the whole week whittling down his parent’s resolve until Karen gave in and allowed Richie to have Eddie over the same night as Mike’s sleepover.

“Spaghetti!” Richie yelled excitedly as he skidded across the hardwood towards the front door before swinging the door open happily.

“Hey Rich,” Eddie laughed, backpack slung over one shoulder and a green sleeping bag held in the opposite hand.

Eddie followed Richie into the Wheelers’ house, waving over his shoulder at his mother who idled in her car in the driveway.

“What’s with the sleeping bag?” Richie asked, leading Eddie to his room to drop off Eddie’s bag.

“Oh,” Eddie frowned as he tossed it onto the end of Richie’s bed. “My mom said we’re getting too old to be sharing a bed,” Eddie shrugged, trying to appear unaffected by this despite his annoyed frown.

“Pft, bullshit,” Richie swore. “You can never be too old for an old fashioned sleepover!”

Eddie’s cheeks twitched as his mouth curled into a pleased smile.

“C’mon, Spaghetti,” Richie cried, wrapping an arm around Eddie’s neck and pulling him in for a playful noogie. “Pizza’s almost here!”

“Mo-om!” Richie moaned as he entered the kitchen with Eddie at his heels. “I’m hungry!”

“Quit your whining,” Karen laughed. “The pizza’s here.”

“Yes!” Richie cheered, rushing towards the stack of steaming pizza boxes.

“Hey, sweetie,” Karen smiled as she caught Eddie’s eye as he followed Richie.

“Hi,” Eddie grinned.

“How have you been lately?” Karen asked, reaching out to brush a hand through Eddie’s hair affectionately.

“Good,” Eddie shrugged, cheeks flushing at Karen’s kindness.

“Good,” Karen smiled back. “You’ve gotten taller, sweetheart,” Karen observed as Eddie hadn’t been at the Wheelers’ house in nearly a

month. “Growth spurt?”

“I guess,” Eddie shrugged again, holding back his pleased smile at Karen’s acknowledgment of his full inch of growth.

“Nah,” Richie chimed in with a wicked grin, chewing loudly on a slice of pepperoni pizza. “He’s still a little goober!”

“I am not!” Eddie whined, reaching out to shove at the laughing boy next to him.

“Whatever you say, leprechaun!”

“Richie!”

“Okay, okay,” Karen laughed at the two. “Why don’t you take the pizza down and eat with the other boys. I think they’re going to watch a movie.”

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, throwing a final glare at Richie before moving to grab the pizza boxes.

“I got ‘em,” Richie shook his head, scooping up the pizza boxes before heading towards the door to the basement. “Think you can keep up with my long legs, munchkin?” Richie threw over his shoulder making Eddie growl.

“Richie!”

“We come bearing gifts!” Richie announced as he and Eddie reached the landing.

“Ugh, what do you guys want, Richie?” Mike sighed.

“We brought pizza,” Richie explained. “But if you’re gonna be an asshole-”

“Wait, no!” Dustin cried, lisping through his missing front teeth. “Please don’t take the pizza!”

“Calm down,” Richie snorted, setting the pizza boxes down on the coffee table and dropping down onto the couch with Eddie following suit. “So, what are we watching?”

“Jaws.”

“Mom let you rent Jaws?!” Richie laughed, eyes wide with surprise.

“Dad took me,” Mike shook his head.

“That makes more sense…”

“Okay,” Richie clapped, rubbing his hands together as Chrissie ran along the beach, undressing herself as she prepared to skinny dip in ocean. “I could get in to this!”

“Shut up, Richie,” Mike groaned, shaking his head at his brother.

“What I can appreciate a nice body-”

“Shh,” Lucas hissed, rolling his eyes.

“Fine, but you guys-”

“Oh,” Eddie gasped as Chrissie’s was briefly tugged under the water by the shark.

“Y’okay?” Richie murmured as Eddie shifted closer to him. Eddie nodded in response, wide eyes glued to the screen. “Hey, c’mere,” Richie encouraged as Eddie jumped again when Chrissie resurfaced, her screams of terror startling Eddie.

“M’okay,” Eddie shook his head, cheeks pink with embarrassment.

“*Spaghetti*,” Richie insisted. “C’mon. S’okay.”

Eddie sucked his bottom lip into his mouth, looking up at Richie before looking around at the other guys whose eyes were all glued to the little screen in the Wheelers’ basement.

“M’kay,” Eddie murmured, shifting closer to Richie and pressing his

cheek to Richie's chest as Richie's arm settled across his shoulders.

"Go, go, go," Eddie chanted, hands slapping against Richie's chest nervously as Brody climbs the mast of the ship to escape the shark, stabbing at it with a spear. "C'mon, shoot him, shoot him! Oh!"

"You okay?" Richie laughed as Eddie covered his mouth with one hand while the shark's blood and guts rained down into the ocean on screen. "You gonna blow chunks on me, Spaghetti?"

"Shut up, Rich," Eddie whined as his stomach turned.

"You're not actually going to sleep on my floor, are you?" Richie asked as he watched Eddie lay out his sleeping bag on the ground next to his bed.

"Yeah," Eddie nodded, looking over at his friend wearily.

"Eds, you're not sleeping on the floor!" Richie shook his head, falling back against his mattress and lifting his legs in the air as he pulled the comforter out from under his body. "C'mon," Richie patted the mattress next to him.

"But-"

"My toes are getting' cold, Spaghetti," Richie warned. "Hop in!"

Eddie groaned and grumbled but climbed under Richie's comforter none the less, snuggling up to his best friend who was wriggling around excitedly.

"Sit still!" Eddie laughed, shoving at Richie's shoulder.

"I'm too excited though," Richie laughed back. "I've got a boy in my bed!" Richie whispered-shouted in a mock-scandalized tone.

"You're an idiot," Eddie snorted, shoving Richie's shoulder again.

"Maybe," Richie shrugged, turning on to his side so he was face to face with Eddie, sharing a single pillow. "But I'm your idiot and

you're stuck with me!”

“Lucky me,” Eddie drawled sarcastically.

16. Dustin-itis

Notes for the Chapter:

> tbh, I dont know what this is but here we are... they're towards the end of their gr 6 year in this one.

Following Mike's sleepover, all six boys had begun to hang out together at school more, sharing a lunch table with Stan and Bill whenever there was space.

Richie whistled happily as he returned from the boys' washroom just outside the cafeteria to meet his friends for lunch. It was pizza day, Richie's favourite day.

Walking into the cafeteria, Richie was greeted with a scene different to the one he had in his head. Instead of rectangles of soft, slightly freezer-burnt pizza there were hushed whispers and familiar cries of terror.

"Spaghetti?" Richie whispered, eyes landing on a crying Eddie. "Hey, what happened?!" Richie shouted across the cafeteria, running towards the table of his friends who were all trying to hush Eddie as their classmates watched on in silence.

"Richie," Mike sighed with relief when he heard his brother's voice.

"We were just joking around," Dustin explained, eyes wide as he turned to Richie. "Then he started freaking out."

Richie's eyebrows scrunched in confusion, knowing there had to be more to the story.

"Stan?" Richie called over his shoulder as he moved towards Eddie, who was clawing at his skin and shrinking away from a worried looking Mike and Will, looking for further details.

"Dustin," Stan hissed, shooting a glare at the other boy. "Told Eddie he licked his pizza when he went to grab milk."

"Fuck, Dustin," Richie swore, shaking his head at the other boy

before straddling the bench next to Eddie. “Hey, Spaghetti,” he cooed, reaching out for Eddie’s knee.

The boy pitched backwards violently, eyes wild as they scanned the room to find who had touched him.

“It’s just me,” Richie hummed, reaching out again and smiling softly when Eddie continued to cry but didn’t pull away from Richie’s grip. “C’mere, bud,” Richie murmured, pulling Eddie closer to him by his knee.

“Rich, he, he, he,” Eddie coughed and gasped, scratching at his neck and stomach as if he could tear the supposedly contaminated food from his body as his words tumbled out of his mouth in a panic.

“Hey, hey, calm down,” Richie told him, grabbing Eddie’s wrists to stop his clawing at his neck. “I know. You’re okay though.”

“But-”

“You’re okay,” Richie repeated, placing Eddie’s still twitching hands in his lap before taking his cheeks in each of his hands. “Look at me,” Richie instructed the still crying and hyperventilating boy. “You’re okay, he was just joking. It’s not true.”

“But-”

“Shh,” Richie hushed him, wrapping his arms around Eddie’s shoulders and pulling the still hiccupping boy to his chest. “You’re okay. It’s not true.”

“I thought it was,” Eddie cried into Richie’s neck, knees knocking against Richie’s due to their awkward angle. “I, I thought-”

“Hey, shh,” Richie interrupted, rubbing a hand up and down Eddie’s back. “I know, I know. It’s not true, though. It’s not. You’re okay. You’re safe, I’ve got you. You’re safe.”

“’M safe?” Eddie whimpered, skin still crawling at the thought of Dustin’s germs wriggling along his pizza as it travelled down his esophagus and into his stomach.

“Mhm,” Richie confirmed, pulling back to push Eddie’s hair out of his face. “No dying of Dustin-itis on my watch,” Richie joked, reaching out to wipe at Eddie’s slowing tears with a thumb.

17. Tommy Jenkins' Older Brother's Magazines

Notes for the Chapter:

> WHO'S READY FOR PUBERTY TO HIT THESE BOYS LIKE A GODDAMN TRAIN!?

“Spaghetti!” Richie grinned as he opened the door to find his best friend.

“Hey, Rich,” Eddie grinned, following his friend into the Wheelers’ house.

“Bill and Stan are in the basement already,” Richie explained as he led them through the kitchen towards the door to the basement.

“Hey, sweetie,” Karen smiled as they passed through the kitchen where she was sat on the phone with a friend.

“Hi, Mrs. Wheeler,” Eddie grinned.

It was the week before the beginning of their first year of middle school. Over the course of elementary school Richie and Eddie had integrated Bill and Stan into their friendship, although Richie and Eddie remained the best of friends, always attached at the hip.

“Don’t stay up too late, boys,” Karen called as they thundered down the basement stairs.

“We won’t!” Richie shouted over his shoulder flippantly, obviously lying.

“Okay,” Richie grinned as the Superman movie credits began to roll, sitting up in his sleeping bag. “I was talkin’ to Tommy Jenkins-”

Eddie interrupted Richie with a loud groan at the mention of Tommy Jenkins. As early as the fourth grade, Richie had started befriending some of the older kids, charming them with his precocious humor

and personality. Eddie had attempted to follow Richie's example and speak to the older kids exactly once before quickly deciding their friendship wasn't for him when they started making dirty jokes that Richie found hilarious but that he didn't understand.

"Great," Stan muttered, knowing whatever Richie had to say would be rude in some way or another.

"Screw you guys," Richie grumbled. "I have a surprise for you guys and you're all bein' assholes-"

"Sorry, Rich," Eddie sighed. "Just, hurry up!"

"Okay, well Tommy's brother's in high school, right?" The other three nodded. "Well, Tommy was in his room and found… *these!*" Richie grinned as he pulled a couple of magazines he had hidden under the couch before his friends arrived.

"Magazines?" Eddie asked, grabbing one of the magazines from Richie's hands before dropping it to his lap like it had burned him. "Wh-wh-"

Richie grinned with excitement at Eddie's flushed face.

"What the hell, Richie!" Stan groaned, throwing the magazine he had picked up back at Richie.

"What?" Richie laughed, catching the magazine as it dropped in his lap.

"Why-"

"*Because*, Eds," Richie drawled, cutting off his blushing best friend. "Tommy wanted to spread the wealth. Cool beans, huh?"

"I gu-guess," Bill nodded, picking up the magazine in Eddie's lap and flipping through it with wide eyes.

"See, look," Richie scooted closer to Eddie in his sleeping bag, flipping open the magazine he was holding. "Tommy said this is called the centrefold. That's where the hottest girls are!"

Eddie pulled his knees to his chest as Richie flipped through the pornographic pages, excitedly pointing out certain images to Eddie and the others.

“Wow, this is-”

“Awesome, I know,” Richie grinned. “You’re welcome, Stan!”

“Nice, is that-”

“You betcha, Billy!” Richie grinned, slapping Bill’s shoulder excitedly as they examined a particularly graphic two-page spread. “I’ve got a woody just thinkin'-”

“I'm tired,” Eddie squeaked, cheeks turning crimson at Richie’s words.

“But, it’s not even eleven, Spaghetti,” Richie frowned at the blushing, uncomfortable boy.

“I had to get up really early this morning,” Eddie swallowed before faking a yawn.

“Oh, okay,” Richie nodded. “Um, well-”

“It’s okay,” Eddie rushed. “You guys can stay up, I’m just gonna lay down over there,” Eddie told his best friend, pointing over to a darker area of the basement.

“Okay,” Richie nodded sadly. “G’night, S’ghetti.”

“Night, Rich,” Eddie whispered before shuffling over to the dark corner.

Eddie lay perfectly still in his sleeping bag, knees pulled to his chest as his arms crossed tightly over them, listening to the other boys talk in hushed, yet excited whispers.

‘*They’re just being disgusting,’* Eddie told himself. ‘*This is what Mr.*

Travers meant when he was talking about urges in health class. That's all this is.'

But then why wasn't Eddie fascinated by the nude women or getting a *woody* as Richie had so eloquently put it.

'*Just another part of me that's broken, I guess*,' Eddie thought glumly, tears burning the back of his eyes as he tried to sniffle as quietly as possible.

18. What do you call a cheap circumcision?

Notes for the Chapter:

> can you tell I've been bouncing back and forth working on a bunch of chapters that have just been sitting in a folder for a while..

“Eddie baby?”

“Yeah, mommy?” Eddie asked, looking up from his dinner towards his concerned looking mother.

“You’re looking skinny, have you been losing weight?”

“Um, I’m not sure,” Eddie shrugged. He had never been particularly concerned about his weight, in fact he couldn’t even approximate how much he weighed.

“Are you eating?”

“Yeah,” Eddie nodded, pointing down at his dinner plate.

“Hmm,” Sonia hummed, shovelling some casserole into her mouth. “I’ll make an appointment for a check-up with Dr. Handor. Just to make sure everything’s okay.”

“Okay, mommy,” Eddie sighed, dropping his head down to one of his hands and picking at his food again.

“Alright and we’ve got 93.5 pounds,” Dr. Handor read off of the scale that a blushing Eddie was standing on in just his underwear. “You can put your clothes back on now, Eddie,” Dr. Handor smiled kindly as Sonia hovered behind him with her own eyes on the scale.

“So,” Sonia prompted as Eddie tugged on his jeans.

“So,” Dr. Handor echoed with a sigh. “Eddie’s looking like he’s at a healthy weight now that he’s at five feet.”

Eddie smiled as he pulled on his shirt before jumping up onto the examination table.

“But, he looks so skinny!” Sonia protested. “Doesn’t he look so skinny? He’s been losing weight, look at him!”

“He’s going through puberty, Sonia,” Dr. Handor reminded her gently. “He’s getting taller and his body is just stretching out. That’s all it is.”

“You don’t see him every day!” Sonia argued. “He’s losing weight even though he’s eating a lot more-”

“Again, a normal sign of puberty,” Dr. Handor interrupted.

“And, and he’s drinking at least four litres of water a day! He’s unquenchable!”

Eddie frowned, eyebrows knotting in confusion. He wasn’t exactly sure how much fluid he typically consumed each day, but he was pretty sure it wasn’t four litres worth.

“And he’s urinating non-stop,” Sonia gushed. “He’s exhausted and weak all the time and he didn’t want me to share this but,” Sonia’s voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. “He’s started wetting the bed.”

“Mom!” Eddie whined. “That’s not tr-”

“It’s alright, Eddie,” Sonia hushed the pink cheeked boy.

“Well, it does sound like he could be at risk for type 1 diabetes. We’ll have to order some blood work-”

“Do you not believe me?!” Sonia roared, face suddenly red with outrage.

Dr. Handor sighed. He had resigned himself to the fact that he would be providing the Kaspbrak’s with a prescription for a disease Eddie didn’t have before they even set foot in his practice that morning.

"*Edward Kaspbrak to the Nurses' office, Edward Kaspbrak to the Nurses' Office."*

"Ugh," Eddie groaned as his name was called over the PA system, slumping forward against the lunch table with his head in his hands.

"Want me to go with you?" Richie asked, reaching out to rub at Eddie's back.

"What I *want*," Eddie groaned, swallowing the lump in his throat as he felt a sudden wave of nausea hit him again. "Is to not get any more damn shots!"

"I know, I'm sorry," Richie muttered. "This sucks."

"Hello, Eddie," the middle school nurse, Nurse Janet, greeted as he opened the door to her office. "Richie," she smiled as she noticed the other boy file in behind him.

"Hey, Nurse J!" Richie grinned, hopping up onto the examination table like he had done every day for the last week.

Eddie followed suit, reluctantly climbing up to take the spot Richie had been patting next to him.

"How are you feeling today, Eddie?" Janet asked, grabbing a new syringe and a vial of insulin that Sonia had supplied her with for Eddie's afternoon injections.

"Okay," Eddie lied with a shrug as he watched her draw the insulin up into the syringe. Janet had originally refused to give Eddie injections without testing his glucose levels but since the school couldn't afford to purchase a Reflomat just for Eddie and Sonia wasn't willing to provide one she was forced to give Eddie his injections without knowing his blood sugar levels first.

"Alright," Janet nodded, setting down the vial before moving towards Eddie and pinching some of the skin on his upper thigh exposed by his shorts. "Ready?"

Eddie whimpered, still terrified of needles despite the fact that this was his eighth shot in less than a week.

“Hey, Spaghetti,” Richie started yapping, grabbing Eddie’s hand and pulling it into his lap. “What do you call a cheap circumcision?”

“Richie!” Eddie groaned, cheeks pink at the fact that Richie was telling one of his dirty jokes in front of the school nurse.

“What do you call it, Eds?”

“I don’t know, Rich,” Eddie sighed. “What?”

“A fuckin’ rip off,” Richie cried, smiling as Eddie let out a surprised giggle despite himself.

“Ow!” Eddie's laugh cut off when he felt the sharp burn of insulin being injected into his muscle.

“You’re all done,” Janet cooed, wiping the injection site and placing a band aid over it quickly.

“Okay, thank you,” Eddie spoke in a quiet voice, hopping down from the examination bench with Richie.

“See ya later, Nurse J,” Richie called over his shoulder, pushing open the door with such force that it loudly smacked on the wall behind it.

“Have a good day boys,” she shook her head, smiling as the two left her office giggling and shoving each other playfully.

“Feelin’ sick again?” Richie asked as Eddie placed his cheek on his hands, hunching over the lunch table across from Bill and Stan once they returned to the cafeteria.

“Yeah,” Eddie mumbled, closing his eyes in an attempt to stop the room from spinning. He winced as the bell rang, signalling the end of lunch.

“Ruh-ready for the ma-math test?” Bill groaned as they all stood up.

“No,” Richie sighed back.

Eddie groaned as he stood, stumbling back into the table as he held his head dizzily.

“Spaghetti?” Richie called, grabbing Eddie’s arm worriedly. Eddie grumbled, unable to hear Richie clearly as his vision became fuzzy and his head spun. “Spaghetti? Shit, Spaghetti!” Richie cried as Eddie’s body seized, pitching forward into Richie’s and knocking both boys to the ground.

“Eddie!” Richie continued to shout, wriggling out from under Eddie’s body. “Eddie!”

A crowd had begun to gather, all of the preteens whispering and gasping as they took in Eddie’s twitching body, his arms held up in the air as his wrists locked at awkward angles.

“Eddie!” Richie screamed, terrified tears pouring down his cheeks. “Help! Somebody get fucking help, goddamit! Eddie!”

“Out of the way, out of the way,” Nurse Janet shouted as she led the paramedics through the crowd of students and towards Eddie and Richie who remained on the ground in the middle of the cafeteria.

Eddie’s body had gone slack after a couple of minutes of seizing and he now lay unconscious beneath a sobbing Richie with drool and blood dripping from the corner of his mouth where he had clamped down on his tongue.

“You gotta move, kid,” the male EMT sighed, trying to pull Richie back from Eddie.

“No! No!” Richie screamed, yanking his arm from the man’s grasp and hunching over Eddie once again. “Don’t touch him!”

“Richie, come on,” Nurse Janet sighed, trying to coax him away from Eddie’s limp body. “You need to let go so they can help Eddie.”

“Spaghetti,” Richie sobbed, face pressed to the top of Eddie’s head as he straddled the boy’s body.

“Ruh-ruh-richie, come o-on,” Bill prompted gently, tugging on the back of Richie’s shirt.

“No!”

“Richie!” Stan groaned. “You’re hurting Eddie more by not letting them help him. Get off of him!”

“Mom,” Richie sobbed as his mother tore into the hospital frantically. “Mom!”

“Sweetheart,” Karen cried, taking in the boy before her. Richie’s hair was wild and tangled like he had be pulling on it for hours. His face was swollen and red from crying, snot and tears running freely down his face and mixing together. He wore the clothes she had seen him leave for school in that morning, but now his shoulder was stained with blood. Blood she could only assume belonged to Eddie. “What happened?”

“I-I,” Richie choked on the mucus collecting at the back of his throat, coughing harshly. “I don’t know, mom. They won’t let me in, I don’t know!”

“Shh,” Karen tried to sooth her son, pulling his face to her shoulder and ignoring the wet squelches his snot covered face was making against her shirt. “It’s okay, we’re gonna figure it out.”

“They took him,” Richie sobbed, clutching his mothers’ and reminding her painfully of a smaller version of himself, curled up in the nurses’ office after Eddie had gone into anaphylaxis in kindergarten. “They just, they just *took* him!”

“I’m sorry, I understand your concern,” the nurse at the nurses’ station apologized. “But we can’t give out private information about patients.”

“I need to see him!” Richie wailed, looking younger than he actually was as he clutched his mother and sobbed.

“Please there has to be a way,” Karen pleaded.

“We have express instructions not to allow any visitors,” the nurse sighed.

“It was her!” Richie shouted, making both women look to him in surprise. “She did this! She did it to him, she’s hurting him!”

“Richie,” Karen breathed. “I know you’re worried about Eddie, but-”

“She’s doing it!” Richie continued. “She’s making him take those shots and they’re hurting him! He was fine before and now, and now,” he broke off into further sobs.

The nurse eyed Richie with interest before asking them to go and sit in the waiting room while she conversed with a doctor. Richie’s words had struck a nerve.

The poor child had gone into hyperglycemic shock. He had clearly gone into an insulin overdose by his mother’s doing.

“It’s her, isn’t it,” Richie spat as the nurse approached them with a forlorn expression. “I told you, I told you she’s doing this to him!”

“I understand your concern,” the nurse told Karen and Richie sincerely, placing a gentle and supportive hand on Richie’s shoulder. “But I just want to make sure you both understand what this truly means for Eddie."

“What do you mean?” Richie asked weakly, sniffling slightly.

“Richie,” the nurse sighed. “Do you know what the Child Welfare Act is?”

“No?” Richie whispered, face open and trusting of the women in front of him.

“Well, we call it the CWA and it’s something the government

introduced this year," the nurse spoke slowly and confidently.

"Okay," Richie nodded.

"Well," the nurse breathed heavily. "It was introduced to protect children in danger in their homes."

"Okay," Richie squeaked again, stomach gurgling nervously. Karen reached out to rub a hand up and down Richie's back supportively.

"Well, based on my own opinions and your concerns about Eddie… It would make his case a candidate for a home visit," the nurse sighed. "Someone would come and visit the Kaspbraks' to see how things are and Eddie would be watched very closely to see if he's admitted or treated by any doctors for any *unexpected* medical conditions."

"Good," Richie nodded, sitting up straighter in his chair. "Then his *stupid* mom-"

"Richie," Karen scolded gently making him frown and fall silent.

"If we get CPS involved and they deem Sonia unfit to take care of Eddie he'll be taken from the home," the nurse told Richie, putting all the cards on the table.

"Taken where?" Richie asked, eyes wide and scared.

"Foster care, most likely," the nurse smiled sadly. "And you boys are still quite young, but… children your age aren't typically adopted as frequently as babies and toddlers. He'd get stuck in the system-"

"We'd adopt him," Richie shrugged as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Karen knew deep down she would, but she hesitated to agree with Richie so readily. She hated herself for it, but she wasn't sure she could handle raising three twelve-year-old boys right now.

"I wish it was that easy, sweetie," the nurse smiled down at him. "But, it's a long and unpredictable process. Eddie could be bounced around from foster home to foster home before a court even considered your adoption case."

“So, what does that mean?” Richie asked in a quiet voice, eyes filled with tears.

“It’s your choice to report this,” the nurse told both Richie and Karen. “But, I just want to make sure you know how this could go if you do. I know it’s not ideal leaving him under her custody but he clearly has your family as a support system when he needs it…”

“So that’s it,” Richie breathed, voice cracking as his face crumpled. “Eddie’s just stuck with that *bitch*?! There’s, there’s n-n-nothing I can do?”

“Richie-”

Karen and the nurse both reached out for the young boy to comfort him only for him to fall back into the vinyl chair behind him, sobbing and clutching at his heaving chest.

“Richie, hey, sweetie,” Karen cooed, rubbing his cheek. “Richie, what’s-”

“I’m hav-having a h-heart att-ack,” Richie choked as tears ran down his cheeks.

“Hey, hey,” the nurse called. “You’re okay, you’re okay. He’s having an anxiety attack.”

“Richie, sweetheart,” Karen cooed again, trying to get him to calm down.

“I-I c-can’t brea-the,” Richie huffed, letting out short puffs of air and struggling to suck oxygen into his lungs. “I-I ca-ca-”

“Richie, hey,” the nurse crouched in front of him. “Breathe with me, okay? Follow my breathing.”

Richie tried to match her pace but the adrenaline rushing through his veins made it hard to focus.

“E-edd-ie,” Richie huffed, face pale and lips blue with a lack of oxygen. “N-need E-eddie.”

“Kaitlyn!” the nurse called from her spot crouched in front of Richie.

“Yeah?” a younger woman asked, head popping around the corner from the nurses’ station.

“Go get Mrs. Kaspbrak for me, please,” the nurse called over her shoulder.

“Ugh,” the girl rolled her eyes. “Can’t Sophie do it? That woman’s a nightmare!”

“Kaitlyn,” the nurse hissed through gritted teeth. “Take a look at what I’m dealing with here. Go… get… her… *now!”*

“Fine,” Kaitlyn sighed, rolling her eyes as her cheeks flushed embarrassedly.

“Sorry, she’s a nursing student,” the nurse sighed to Karen. “Top of her class, but you can’t teach empathy…”

“Sonia,” Karen sighed once the large woman finally appeared in the hallway. Richie looked close to passing out.

“What are you doing here,” Sonia groaned.

“Please let him see Eddie,” Karen begged, holding Richie’s hand tightly.

“Not a chance!”

“Sonia, *please*,” Karen continued as Richie began crying harder, coughing and choking as he whimpered out Eddie’s name. Sonia looked over at him, noticing the gasping Richie for the first time. His gasping reminded her exactly of Eddie. *“Please.*”

“Eds,” Richie choked as he was carted into the room by his shoulders. “E-eds!”

“Rich!” Eddie smiled weakly, setting down a cup of red Jello he had been shovelling into his mouth.

“You’re okay,” Richie breathed as he collapsed against Eddie with his face against his neck, ignoring Sonia’s squawks of protest. “I was *so* worried, but you’re okay!”

“I feel like shit,” Eddie muttered, running his fingers through the back of Richie’s hair. “But, yeah. I’ll be okay.”

“Never do that to me again,” Richie gasped, a new wave of tears spring to his eyes. “Never again!”

“I’ll try my best, Rich,” Eddie laughed softly, squeezing Richie’s shaking form as tightly as his weakened arms allowed.

Notes for the Chapter:

> just want to say, in today's day and age the nurse's response to Richie's abuse claims wouldn't fly but we're talking about 1980 in this fic. thats almost 40 years ago. the protection of children was only first beginning to be legally regulated in the states then and the whole system was still pretty flimsy so I dont think its the most unrealistic thing to happen in these stories... I mean there inter-dimensional monsters in this universe.
>
> also goddamn dr handor would have some malpractice lawsuits on his hands...

19. VHS Tapes

Notes for the Chapter:

> this is kinda shitty and short but its something... sorry I haven't posted in so long I'm ridiculously busy right now.

After being hospitalized for a week following his insulin overdose, Eddie began spending an increasing amount of time with the Wheelers once again. Unbeknownst to him Karen had threatened to contact CPS unless Sonia allowed Eddie to spend each weekend at the Wheelers' house as Karen was concerned with leaving Eddie in her care for full days at a time when Eddie had no school to escape to.

"Hey, Mrs. Wheeler?" Eddie asked, hands splayed on the counter of the kitchen island where Karen sat reading.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"It's time for my medicine," he reminded her in a small voice, pointing at the watch on his wrist that beeped like clockwork thanks to Sonia's programming. "For my ear."

"Oh, Eddie, honey," Karen sighed, closing her book and twisting to look down at him. "I already told you, you don't need to take that this weekend."

"But," Eddie's voice was small and scared. "I'm sick. My mom said I have an ear infection."

"Is it hurting you right now?" Karen prompted, trying to prove to Eddie that he didn't actually have an ear infection.

"Uh huh," Eddie nodded shyly making her sigh once again.

"Okay, sweetie," Karen nodded, standing to grab the antibiotics that Sonia had sent in Eddie's bag with him to school on Friday since he came straight to the Wheelers' that night. "I'll grab it for you."

"Thank you," Eddie squeaked, climbing up onto one of the empty

barstools to wait for Karen to measure out the medicine that he didn't actually need.

"Uh-uh-alright, boys," Bill started as the clock struck midnight. Richie's parents had gone to bed nearly an hour ago and the boys were left watching movies in the basement, as they did every Friday while Mike and his friends occupied it on Saturdays. "We've all suh-seen Ruh-Richie's magazines, but I-I've got suh-suh-something better."

"Impossible," Richie snorted, cold toes wiggling against Eddie's thighs under their shared blanket as they sat on opposite ends of the couch.

"Wanna buh-bet?" Bill grinned, pulling a black VHS tape from his backpack.

"No, shit," Richie laughed before turning to look at Eddie's wide eyes and pink cheeks. "Um, uh, I dunno about this Big Bill. It's not-"

"No, Rich," Eddie shook his head, digging his toes into Richie's thigh. "It's okay. We can watch if you guys wanna."

"Y'sure?" Richie asked, expression wary as he remembered Eddie's discomfort with the pornographic magazines Richie had brought to their sleepover a few months ago.

"Mhm," Eddie nodded, mind screaming the exact opposite as Bill turned to pop the tape into the VHS player.

Minutes later Eddie found himself curled into himself in horror as a man with a bushy moustache swirled his tongue obscenely around a woman's… *you know*. His cheeks were flaming and he hugged his knees so tightly to his chest they were starting to cramp up.

'Please stop, please stop, please stop,' Eddie's screamed internally, nails digging into the soft flesh of his shins.

“Y’okay Spaghetti?” Richie murmured as Bill and Stan watched the fuzzy little screen in the Wheelers’ basement with rapt attention.

“Mhm,” Eddie squeaked, unable to get any real words past his tightly pursed lips.

“Y’sure?”

“I’m fine, Richie,” Eddie snapped, embarrassed by the way Richie was babying him as Stan and Bill turned to look at them curiously.

“Okay,” Richie nodded, reclining back on the opposite end of the couch. “Sorry.”

‘Why don’t I like this?’ Eddie thought to himself. *‘What the fuck is wrong with me. I hate this. I hate this. I hate this.’*

The group settled back into silence, the only sounds in the room being the woman’s obnoxious and obviously fake moans.

Eddie watched as the man pulled back from the writhing woman, moving off the bed to shuck off his pants. He swallowed audibly, unsure of how to react to what was coming next. Sure, he knew what sex was, Richie was his best friend after all, but actually seeing the gory details was a very different thing.

His cheeks flamed again as the largest penis he had ever seen sprung from the man’s tight underwear.

‘Holy shit,’ Eddie thought to himself, cheeks heating up as he took in the man’s anatomy. *‘How the fuck-’*

“Lame,” Richie snorted, making them all jolt in surprise. “My wang’s twice as big. Right, Eds?”

“Shut up, Richie,” Eddie muttered as his entire body flushed hotly. “That’s disgusting.”

“Awe, c'mon, don’t you remember how big Little Rich is?” Richie joked, crawling closer towards a blushing Eddie. “Don’t you remember when we used to have bubble baths with Mike-”

“Richie!” Eddie squeaked, confusedly shrinking away from Richie. He had never felt as uncomfortable with having Richie’s attention on him as he did now but he figured it had something to do with the fact that a man was now thrusting into a down right irritatingly loud woman a few feet in front of them.

“What’s wrong?” Richie frowned, sitting back on his heels.

“You’re being gross,” Eddie whispered, eyes focused on the way the man’s muscles contracted on each thrust with interest as he avoided Richie’s gaze. “Just get away from me.”

“Why what’s wrong?” Richie joked again, leaning forward to pull the blanket back from Eddie’s lap. “Scared I’ll see your b-oh.”

“Richie!” Eddie shrieked, turning away from the other boy to hide himself. He had a vague idea of what was happening as his penis seemed to throb painfully, but he didn’t want Richie to see. “Oh, my God!”

“S-s-sorry, S’ghetti,” Richie apologized his cheeks now equally as red as Eddie’s as said boy scrambled away from him and into the bathroom before slamming the door. "I didn't think you'd actually-fuck!"

“You’re such an idiot, Richie,” Stan shook his head, still watching the screen intently.

“Fuck off, Stan,” Richie muttered, pulling the blanket up to his nose to cover his flaming cheeks.

20. Hit the Showers

Notes for the Chapter:

> I have an exam tomorrow so naturally im doing everything but studying... enjoy the incoming avalanche of writing as a result...
>
> also im sorry for this one.

Things between Eddie and Richie had been tense ever since their *special* movie night in the Wheelers' basement. They continued to spend their weekends together and every possible moment with one another at school, but there was a decidedly awkward aura surrounding them.

Richie felt bad but was beyond confused as to why Eddie was as upset as he was over what had happened. Eddie was furious that Richie didn't understand why he was upset while also being slightly confused at his own heightened anger. Eddie typically forgave Richie when he was upset with him within seconds.

Most of all though, Eddie was terrified. Terrified by what his lack of interest in the woman on Bill's video meant. Terrified by what his intense interest in the man on screen meant. Terrified by the fact that Richie might know how his body reacted to the video. Logically he knew that his best friend couldn't really tell what Eddie had found… *arousing* about the video but he was still terrified.

'You're not a fag,' he reminded himself. It had become something of a mantra to him in the last few weeks.

'*You're not a fag, you like girls!*' he reminded himself as he embarrassedly scrubbed his body under the lukewarm water of the locker room showers. One of the many downsides of middle school was the boys' locker room. Not only was he forced to change in front of a room of other boys, all at very stages of puberty, but he also had

to shower in front of them too.

Eddie hated it to say the least.

'You're not a fag,' he reminded himself sternly as he self-consciously showered facing away from the rest of the boys. None of his friends were in his Phys Ed class. They all had gym together in the period after Eddie's class. Peeking over his shoulder warily at the other boys who were all laughing obnoxiously and shoving one another in the soap scum-covered room, his cheeks flushed. *'You're not a fag!'* he repeated, quickly turning away.

"Hey," came a loud voice from behind Eddie, making him jump in surprise. "Were you looking at me?"

'Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry,' Eddie screamed at himself, squeezing his eyes closed in fear.

"Hey, I'm fucking talking to you *faggot*," came the harsh voice again.

"You lookin' at our dicks, fairy?" came a second, more familiar voice of Troy Harrington.

'Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry-'

"Hey!"

Eddie cried out in pain as his nose smacked into the tiled wall in front of him sending blood gushing down his face and bare chest.

"Don't you fuckin' ignore us, *faggot*," Troy spat as Henry Bowers twisted Eddie's arm painfully behind his back, forcing him to face the group of boys. A few looked scared and unsure of what was about to happen while others watched with interest, preparing for a fight that Eddie was sure to lose. "You lookin' at our dicks?"

"N-no," Eddie whimpered, voice nasally as he clutched his bleeding nose with his hand that wasn't being held behind his back by Henry, desperately wanting to cover himself.

"Why not?" Troy snorted, almost sounding offended. "Our dicks not good enough for you, fairy? Only like your faggot boyfriend's dick?"

“I-I-I’m not-”

“What was that?” Troy sneered but Eddie fell silent, too afraid to speak. “That’s what I thought, faggot,” Troy laughed before nodding his head at Henry who shoved Eddie towards Troy.

Soon Eddie was being shoved back and forth amongst a group of boys, tripping and scraping his knees on the tiled floor as the blood around his nose began to dry.

‘Don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry,” Eddie continued to internally scream at himself as he was shoved one final time to the floor as the bed rang, signalling the end of the period.

“Better not catch you perving on us again,” Troy hissed, aiming a kick at Eddie’s stomach. “Got it, faggot?”

Eddie curled into himself, clutching his stomach in pain as tears began to stream down his face.

“Spaghetti?”

‘Richie,’ Eddie thought to himself.

“Oh, my God,” Richie cried, throwing himself down on the wet tile next to Eddie. “Spaghetti. What the- holy- oh, my God.”

“Don’t touch me,” Eddie gasped, turning away from Richie as he reached out with a gentle hand. “Don’t touch me.”

“But,” Richie swallowed thickly, holding back worried tears. “It’s me, Spaghetti-Head. It’s me! Are you hurt-”

“I said, don’t fucking touch me!” Eddie sobbed, ripping his shoulder from Richie’s grip and pushing himself up onto unsteady feet.

Richie looked up at the group of boys that had gathered in the door way, blinking back tears that had begun to fall without his permission as Eddie’s naked and sore body hobbled towards the back row of lockers in the locker room.

“Spaghetti?” Richie swallowed, approaching Eddie warily.

“Don’t *fucking* call me that Richie,” Eddie hissed, leaning back against his gym locker with a fluffy towel wrapped around his shaking shoulders.

“What,” Richie took a shaky breath. “What did I do?”

“I’m not a fag, Richie,” Eddie answered, glaring up at Richie.

“Spag-”

“Fucking don’t!”

“Eddie,” Richie paused, moving to sit next to Eddie who shrunk away from him. “What happened? What’s going on? I don’t understand-"

“Everyone thinks I’m a fucking faggot, Richie,” Eddie whispered. “That’s what.”

“Spa-”

“STOP IT!” Eddie screamed making Richie jump in surprise.

“Okay,” Richie whispered. “I’m sorry.”

The two sat in silence, the only sound being the boys preparing for gym class a few rows of lockers away and Eddie’s quiet sniffles.

"Who did it?"

"Who do you think?" Eddie sighed, pulling his knees to his chest and resting his chin on them.

"I'll fucking kill them," Richie hissed.

"Richie, please don't," Eddie sighed. "You'll only make it worse... and they'll kick your ass too."

"I don't care," Richie answered making Eddie smile softly.

"Yeah, but I do."

“D’you wanna hug?” Richie whispered, aching to making Eddie feel better.

“Richie, I-” Eddie breathed.

“They can’t see us,” Richie promised, gesturing towards the metal lockers hiding them from view. “It’s just us. Please?”

Eddie launched himself at Richie without a second thought, burying his face in Richie’s neck as he straddled his best friend, completely forgetting about the fact that he was nearly naked.

“I’m not a fag,” Eddie breathed, slow tears tickling the sensitive skin of Richie’s neck.

“Hey,” Richie cooed, shrugging back to look down at Eddie’s face. “I believe you.”

“I’m not a fag,” Eddie hiccupped again, holding eye contact with Richie.

“Please stop saying that,” Richie whispered, biting his lip. “I hate hearing that word coming from you.”

“I promise though,” Eddie insisted.

“Hey,” Richie repeated, pulling Eddie to his chest again. “Whatever you say you are, that’s what you are and I believe you completely. You don’t need to prove anything to me or those jack asses.”

“Rich,” Eddie whimpered quietly.

“Yeah?”

“You gotta stop calling me Spaghetti,” Eddie sighed, leaning back to look up at Richie with a frown.

“But-”

“And hugging me and calling me stupid, girly names and

pinching my cheeks, and, and," Eddie hiccupped, breathing hitching dangerously.

"Hey, hey, hey, don't," Richie warned, not wanting Eddie to have an asthma attack. "I'll stop. If you want me to, I'll stop. I promise."

"Thank you," Eddie whispered, looking down at his lap in shame. He was hurting his best friend all because he was afraid of being called names. "I'm sorry. I just… I can't be gay."

"Shh," Richie sighed, pulling Eddie in for another hug, painfully aware that it would be one of the last ones he'd get in a while.

21. Wanna know what else I think?

Notes for the Chapter:

> disappears for two weeks then posts 3 chapters in 24 hours... that's me! consistency is key!

“Hey, Eds,” Richie called over the bustle of the hallway. “My mom got Sno Balls and packed two with my lunch. Want one?”

“Oh,” Eddie shut his locker. “No thanks, I’m having lunch with Beverly today.”

“But you love Sno Balls,” Richie pouted, face falling sadly at the realization that Eddie was bailing on him and the guys to go eat lunch with *Beverly* once again.

“I’m sorry, Rich,” Eddie sighed. “I already promised.”

“Fine,” Richie groaned. “Have fun with your *girlfriend*.”

“She’s not my girlfriend,” Eddie bit back angrily, although he was secretly pleased with the insinuation. Appearing as though he were interested in girls was one of the main reasons he had started spending time with Beverly, even if their friendship was strictly platonic.

“Whatever,” Richie laughed, curls flopping. “As long as I can be your mistress who you come back to when you need some loving-”

“Bye, Richie,” Eddie groaned, rolling his eyes at Richie’s attempt at a joke as he walked off towards the outdoor picnic tables where Beverly preferred to eat lunch.

“So, what’s up with you and Richie?” Beverly asked, innocently picking at the triangle of ham and cheese Eddie had shared with her.

“What do you mean?” Eddie asked, cheeks flushing unnecessarily.

‘He’s just your best friend,’ he reminded himself. *‘Everyone knows he’s*

your best friend. Don't make it weird!'

"Just heard you guys have been friends a really long time," Beverly shrugged, eating the piece of ham from her now deconstructed sandwich. Beverly had moved to Hawkins about a year ago and had heard all about how close Eddie and Richie were from her classmates.

"That's disgusting," Eddie commented as he watched her eat, making her laugh. "Yeah, we've been best friends since the first day of kindergarten."

"That's cute," Beverly smiled warmly. "Bet you're really close."

"Well, I'm mean, yeah," Eddie swallowed his bite of sandwich, words muffled by the hand he covered his mouth with as he chewed. "It's been like… seven years, I think."

"*I think*," Beverly mocked with a snorted. "As if you don't know."

Eddie shrugged in response, focusing on his sandwich nervously.

"He seems really sweet with you," Beverly spoke again, making Eddie choke on his sandwich slightly.

"Wh-what do you mean?" Eddie sputtered, taking a sip of his apple juice. "What are you talking about?"

"Calm down," Beverly laughed, eyes shining knowingly. "Just, the way he treats you. I've seen him walk you to class and stuff. And that one time when he came running out to make sure you had your inhaler because it was really humid and he knew your asthma was probably going to act up... So adorable."

"He's just a good friend," Eddie shrugged, eyes focused downward on the table. "We've been through a lot. We just know each other really well…"

"I'm sure you do," Beverly smiled. "Oh, you've got some mustard," Beverly commented, licking her thumb and reaching out to rub at the corner of Eddie's mouth without thinking.

“No!” Eddie pitched backwards, falling from the picnic bench and landing on his tailbone painfully.

“Shit, Eddie,” Beverly jumped from her side of the table. “I wasn’t thinking! I’m sorry! Shit!”

“Richie,” Eddie croaked, already scrubbing at his cheek with his palms as fat tears began to pour down his face. “Need Richie!”

“S’ghetti,” Richie huffed, skidding to a halt next to Eddie and dropping to his knees in front of the crying boy. Eddie had gotten a lot better at handling his mysophobia and most people at school knew to steer clear of upsetting Eddie, but the occasional accident still happened. “Hey, hey, it’s okay Spaghetti-Man,” Richie cooed, carefully opening Eddie’s fanny pack to pull out some disinfectant. He hadn’t used that nickname in weeks and the sound of it made Richie’s cheeks warm pleasantly.

“Rich,” Eddie gasped.

“I’m gonna clean your face, okay bub?” Richie asked, placing a gentle hand on Eddie’s shoulder and sighing with relief when the boy didn’t push him away. “There we go, good job,” Richie murmured as Eddie hiccupped sadly.

“All clean, Spaghetti,” Richie smiled, throwing the disinfectant soaked napkin he had used on Eddie’s face on the ground next to him.

“Y'shouldn’t litter,” Eddie mumbled before moving forward to hide his face in Richie’s neck, making the other boy bark with laughter as Beverly watched the two.

“I’ll see ya later,” Eddie waved as he veered in another direction to go and meet Beverly for lunch.

“Wait, Eds,” Richie frowned. It had been a few days since Eddie had last eaten with Beverly. “You sure?”

“I’m fine, Richie,” Eddie sighed. “It’s not like it’s gonna happen again. It was an accident, she wasn’t thinking. She already apologized.”

“Y’sure?” Richie asked. “What if she-”

“I'll be fine. I’ll meet you at your locker after school, idiot,” Eddie shook his head with a smile before turning to leave Richie in the middle of the hallway alone.

“Hey,” Beverly mumbled as she carefully accepted a half of Eddie’s sandwich. “I’m really sorry again. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“I already said, it’s *fine,*” Eddie laughed, shaking his head.

“But-”

“No, buts!” Eddie silenced her. “It’s okay. Everything was okay.”

“Yeah, thank God for Richie,” Beverly nodded, remembering the way he had calmed Eddie down.

“Yeah,” Eddie laughed. “He has a lot of experience with my freak-a-zoid moments…”

“Hey, no,” Beverly shook her head with a smile. “You’re not a freak-a-zoid.”

“Thanks,” Eddie snorted, taking a bite of his sandwich. “But I definitely am!”

“Nah, I don’t think so,” Beverly shook her head. “But… I was thinking about the other day.”

“What about it?”

“Just the way Richie was able to calm you down,” Beverly explained.

“O-kay,” Eddie pressed. “And?”

“I think he likes you,” Beverly shrugged, popping a corner of her sandwich into her mouth casually.

“Wh-what,” Eddie sputtered, staring at her in disbelief. “What are you talking about? Of course, he likes me, he’s my best friend. If he hated me-”

“You know that’s not what I mean, Eddie,” Beverly smirked at the blushing boy. “I think he *like*-likes you.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Eddie shook his head, unsuccessfully trying to appear calm despite the fact that he felt like his whole world was crumbling inside him.

“That’s your opinion,” Beverly laughed. “But I think he does.”

“And I think you’re insane!” Eddie shot back.

“Wanna know what else I think?” Beverly grinned.

“No,” Eddie pouted, knowing she was going to tell him anyways.

“I think you like him too,” Beverly answered, a devilish smirk lighting up her features.

“Absolutely not!” Eddie protested vehemently, knocking his milk over with his wildly flailing limbs. “I don’t! I would never, ever, ever!”

‘Fuck!’ Eddie’s screamed internally. *‘Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!’*

Notes for the Chapter:

> also I promise im working on ST2.. im like 10 pages in and we haven't even left the Byers' house yet so its gonna be a long one....

22. Damn you, Marsh…

“Ready, Georgie?”

“Ready!” Georgie screamed happily, tightening the hold he had on Richie’s shoulders.

Richie, Eddie, Stan, and Bill had taken Bill’s five-year-old brother Georgie out to play in the park to give Mrs. Denbrough a bit of a break.

“3…2…1!” Eddie cried before Bill, Stan, and Richie took off, running across the grassy field. They were in a race to the soccer net and back, Richie and Georgie running as a piggy-back team.

“Go, Georgie, go!” Eddie yelled across the field as Richie huffed and puffed, Bill and Stanley purposely trailing behind to let the other two win. “C’mon…So Close! Yeah! Georgie and Richie win!”

“Yes!” Georgie cheered, smacking happily at the top of Richie’s head making him laugh and protest playfully.

“Watch the noggin, little man,” Richie joked, crouching enough for Georgie to easily hop down from his back. “Gotta be careful you don’t kill the last few brain cells I’ve got left.”

“Sorry, Richie,” Georgie laughed, smiling brightly up at Richie.

“That’s okay,” Richie chuckled, ruffling Georgie’s hair. “Just kiddin’, bud!”

“W-w-woah, Georgie,” Bill gasped with mock-exhaustion. “You two sh-sh-sure we’re f-fast.”

“Yeah,” Stan nodded along, collapsing to the ground dramatically. “Fast as lightning!”

“We’re the best-est team! Right, Richie?” Georgie smiled, jumping towards Richie and throwing his arms around the taller boy’s neck, falling into Richie’s chest slightly.

“The very best!” Richie nodded, scooping Georgie up in both of his arms victoriously.

Eddie smiled, watching the two boys as his stomach swooped suspiciously.

“And then-”

“Richie!”

Both boys stopped in the middle of the hallway, turning to search for the source of yelling of Richie’s name.

“What’s up, Beth?” Richie smiled kindly at the shorter blonde girl from his science class as she ran up to them.

“Just wondering when you wanted to meet up to work on the bio project,” Beth smiled, thumbs hooked in the straps of her backpack.

“Oh, um,” Richie chewed his lip, mentally reviewing his personal schedule for the next few days. “Are we doing anything this Saturday, Eds?”

“Um, no,” Eddie shook his head, cheeks flushing for reasons unclear to all three preteens.

“Saturday work for you, Beth?” Richie asked, turning back to the girl. “We can work at my place as long as Eds doesn’t mind sharing me for the afternoon.”

“Yeah, sure,” the girl nodded with a giggle, blinking far too frequently in Eddie’s opinion.

“You don’t mind do ya, Eds?” Richie asked, looking down at his best friend.

“Why would I mind?” Eddie shrugged. “I can hang out with Mike and the others-” Richie interrupted Eddie’s words with a snort, making Eddie glare playfully. “Yeah, I’ll probably just do homework in your room,” Eddie finished with a laugh.

“Okay, well,” Beth interrupted, trying to draw Richie’s attention back to her. “I’ll see you Saturday, Richie!”

“Yeah, see you then,” Richie smiled, waving as the girl walked off.

“So,” Eddie started as they continued down the hallway towards Eddie’s locker. “Beth?”

“What about her?” Richie asked, stopping to lean his hip against the closed locker next to Eddie’s as he waited for Eddie to collect his things before heading home for the day.

“Nothing, I guess,” Eddie shrugged, busying himself with collecting the textbooks he’d need over the weekend.

“We’re just science partners, Eds,” Richie laughed, turning to lean his back fully against the metal locker.

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, handing Richie his backpack to hold open so he could stuff his books inside.

“Why?” Richie asked, a teasing grin growing on his lips. “You jealous, Eds?”

“Of what?” Eddie snorted, cheeks flushing brightly. “You getting to spend time with Beth?”

“Sure,” Richie nodded with a smile, not meaning that at all.

“Not a chance,” Eddie shook his head. “I feel bad for the poor girl. Paired for science with you of all people.”

“Hurtful,” Richie pouted, zipping Eddie’s backpack before helping Eddie put each strap on his shoulders.

“Thanks,” Eddie muttered, blushing a deeper crimson at Richie’s unconscious actions.

“Hey, Spaghetti,” Richie murmured, turning onto his side to stare at

the blurry form he knew to be Eddie but that he couldn't clearly see without his glasses on.

“It’s one AM, Rich,” Eddie sighed, eyes still closed in an effort to show that he was trying to sleep. He typically let Richie’s use of Spaghetti related nicknames slide when they were alone.

“I was thinkin’-”

“Uh, oh,” Eddie joked making Richie laugh and shove his shoulder into the mattress lightly.

“Shut up,” Richie hissed. “I was thinkin’ about the future.”

“Okay,” Eddie prompted, eyes still closed as he tried to appear disinterested. “What about it?”

“Do you think you wanna have kids some day?”

Eddie felt his whole body flush hotly.

“Um, I, uh,” Eddie stammered, wriggling uncomfortably on Richie’s plush mattress in the pitch-black room. “I dunno…”

“I do,” Richie answered, turning to fall flat on his back once again.

“You do?” Eddie asked, turning onto his side to peek at his best friend, genuinely surprised and interested in what Richie had to say.

“Yeah, I think so,” Richie nodded, starring up at his ceiling. “I want my own family and kids to teach stuff to.”

“Like what?” Eddie whispered, biting his lip.

“I dunno,” Richie shrugged, shoulders dragging on the mattress beneath him. “Just like how to do stuff and like about music and good jokes. Stuff like that… I dunno. It’s stupid-”

“It’s not stupid,” Eddie breathed, reaching out to grab Richie’s bicep. “I think you’ll be a great dad someday, Rich.”

“You do?” Richie asked, voice sounding both hopeful and vulnerable

as he turned back to face Eddie.

“Yeah,” Eddie nodded, swallowing hard at the short distance that existed between their faces. He could feel Richie’s hot breath on his cheek, making him squirm.

“I think you’d be a good dad too,” Richie whispered, reaching a hand out to brush the hair that he knew, but couldn't actually see, was falling into Eddie’s eyes. “Teach ‘em all about cars and stuff. You’d be the best dad in the world, S’ghetti.”

“Thanks,” Eddie choked, breathing hitching at Richie’s words.

‘Damn you, Marsh,’ Eddie thought to himself, remembering her beliefs about his feelings towards Richie. *‘Fuck you very, very much*.’

23. O, Lord I put him in thy hands.

Notes for the Chapter:

shit man, this is fucking sad but I like it anyway.

“I know it’s stupid,” Eddie whispered, the inside of his dry lips sticking to Richie’s t-shirt from where he lay curled under Richie’s arm. “But I don’t want tomorrow to come.”

“S’not stupid, bub,” Richie promised in a soft tone, running his fingers up and down the length of Eddie’s bicep in a decidedly non-platonic manner that Eddie would have protested in any other situation. He squirmed at Richie’s words, confused by the nickname Richie had been pulling out a hell of a lot lately but also loving it. The affection with which he said it both scared and thrilled him.

“It is,” Eddie sighed, bringing a hand up to rest in the centre of Richie’s chest, directly in front of his own face, to watch it rise and fall in time with Richie’s breathing as he listened to the dull thud of his best friend’s heart beating against his cheek. Despite his sad demeanour, he felt so warm and safe. “It’s just one day, it doesn’t actually mean anything. I should be as sad today as I will be tomorrow. It’s been seven years, it’s stupid-”

“Hey, don’t do that,” Richie protested, pinching the baby fat on the back of Eddie’s arm.

“Don’t do what?” Eddie asked, tilting his head on Richie’s chest so he could look up at Richie’s face.

“Act like it doesn’t matter because it happened when you were little,” Richie responded, laying exactly what Eddie was thinking out in the open. “You are allowed to be as sad or as happy as you want to be today, tomorrow, and every other fuckin’ day. There’s no rules to your feelings.”

Eddie sucked his bottom lip into his mouth as tears began to turn the back of his eyes. Letting out a shuddery breath Eddie surged up Richie’s body, wriggling his arms behind Richie’s back and looping

them around his neck before pressing his face to the taller boy's soft skin. Richie reacted immediately, grabbing Eddie's hips and pulling the boy directly on top of him so he'd be more comfortably situated before rubbing a soothing palm up and down Eddie's back, the other remaining on one of Eddie's hips.

Richie sniffled slightly, feeling his own eyes burn with the warning of tears as he listened to Eddie weep quietly, before pressing a quick and barely-there kiss to the top of Eddie's head with blushing cheeks.

"Doesn't this weird you out?" Eddie croaked once he'd stopped crying, turning his head enough to breath more comfortably.

"What?"

"This," Eddie answered with a shrug. "Us. None of the other guys-"

"Fuck the other guys, Spaghetti," Richie interrupted, rolling his eyes. "Make sure you fuck me first though," Richie added jokingly, never one to remain serious for too long.

"You're an idiot," Eddie laughed, moving his leg to jab his knee into Richie's side in reprimand.

"But I'm your idiot," Richie answered without missing a beat. It had become something of a motto of his.

"Yup," Eddie sighed miserably but turned his head to hide his smile against one of his biceps.

"Spaghetti?" Richie whispered, rolling over to face his best friend's back in the soft morning light. "Y'okay, Spaghetti?" he whispered again, reaching a hand out to Eddie's shoulder as his body was curled away from Richie.

"Yeah," Eddie whispered, voice hollow and distant.

It was the seventh anniversary of Frank's passing and it seemed like this year was going to be as hard on Eddie as every year previous.

Richie scooted forward silently until his chest was pressed against Eddie's back, curling an arm over Eddie's shoulders and tucking his hand in the crook between Eddie's neck and his pillow.

"Hungry?" Richie asked with a hum.

"No," Eddie answered in the same soft and hollow voice as before, twisting his body until he faced Richie and tucking his head under Richie's chin before the tell-tale shaky gasp of breath signalled the beginning of Eddie's heart wrenching sobs.

"You're okay," Richie murmured, tiling his chin to press his lips to Eddie's forehead as he tangled their ankles together and rubbed at Eddie's back. "I've got you, you're okay."

"Boys?" Karen whispered, peeking warily into the room. She had just gotten Mike and Nancy off to school, Mike fighting the whole time that it wasn't fair that Richie got to stay home with Eddie.

"He's asleep," Richie whispered, lips ruffling Eddie's hair as he spoke.

"Okay," Karen nodded, approaching the bed and leaning over to press a soft kiss to each of the boys' heads. "Let me know if he needs anything."

"M'kay," Richie agreed, cheeks tinging pink for reasons unknown to him.

"Hey," Richie whispered, smiling softly as Eddie stirred awake.

"Hi," Eddie murmured, rubbing at his painfully swollen eyes.

"I missed you when you were asleep," Richie joked, squeezing the hip his hand was settled on.

"Sorry," Eddie whispered, letting his cheek drop back against Richie's warm chest. Richie frowned, hoping to get a sarcastic response from his best friend.

“D’you need anything?” Richie asked, staring at Eddie’s slack and vacant expression. “Food or like, the bathroom or anything?”

“No,” Eddie whispered.

“Wanna call your mom or...?” Richie tried, knowing that that was one of his worst attempts at convincing Eddie Kaspbrak to get out of bed.

“No,” Eddie whispered again, throwing the arm not being squished between his body and the mattress over Richie’s chest and curled it as far under Richie as he could, effectively trapping his best friend. “Jus’ wanna stay with you.”

Richie’s worried face softened into a small smile.

“Okay, Spagheds,” Richie agreed. “Whatever you wanna do.”

“Rich,” Eddie whispered into the dark and silent room. They had both been dozing in and out of consciousness for hours now, Eddie breaking off into fits of tears occasionally before settling down again for a nap.

“Uh huh?” Richie breathed, covering his mouth with the back of his hand as he let out a big yawn.

“Can we,” Eddie swallowed, exhaling heavily. “Can we go… see my dad?” Eddie asked, voice growing steadily quieter as he spoke.

“Course, bub,” Richie agreed, ruffling the back of Eddie’s hair with his finger tips.

“Thank you, Mrs. Wheeler,” Eddie whispered as they pulled up at the local Hawkins cemetery.

“Of course, sweetheart,” Karen smiled, twisting in her seat to look back at the two in the row of seats behind her. “I’ll wait here for you guys, okay?” she asked, reaching out to comb her fingers through the front of Eddie’s messy bangs, brushing them out of his face.

“Okay,” Eddie nodded, following Richie out of the station wagon.

The car door slammed behind the two, Richie shoving it closed with more effort that necessary as per usual.

“It’s two rows to the left-” Eddie started, pointing ahead of them.

“I remember,” Richie interrupted softly, shooting Eddie a sad smile. Eddie nodded before looking down at his shoes again. “Can I…”

“Hmm?” Eddie hummed, looking up at Richie who had rosy red cheeks and held a pot of purple pansies with a small spade sticking out of the dirt in one hand to plant at his fathers plot.

“Can I hold your hand?” Richie asked, cheeks darkening in embarrassment. Although they were still attached at the hip, hand holding had been something they left back in the third grade when they got pushed into a muddy puddle by sixth graders after being called faggots.

“Yes,” Eddie breathed, reaching out a hand for Richie to take and nodding urgently. He wanted nothing more than to hold his best friend’s hand right now.

Frank Kaspbrak

1938-1972

O, Lord I put him in thy hands.

Eddie started sobbing as soon as he saw the headstone, reading the epitaph bitterly. His aunt had tried to convince his mother to use a Jimi Hendrix lyric that Eddie couldn’t remember, just like his father had asked. It had been a huge blow-out of a fight that had started their seven-year estrangement from Frank’s family.

“Spaghetti,” Richie hissed, setting down the potted plant gently and moving towards Eddie. “Shit,” he swore, rifling through Eddie’s pocket for his inhaler as the boy’s breathing became shallower and

tears soaked the collar of his shirt.

As Richie wiped the snot and tears that mixed under Eddie's nose and covered his lips with the sleeve of his sweater he primed Eddie's inhaler and gently pushed it between the boys glistening lips.

"Better?" Richie asked as Eddie let out a bitter, medicinal breath. Eddie ignored Richie's question, instead moving to wrap his arms around Richie's neck and continued sobbing.

Richie recapped Eddie's inhaler over his shoulder before pushing it into his own pocket and wrapping his arms around Eddie.

"I see the moon, the moon sees me," Richie sang softly, smiling as a gust of warm spring wind ruffled their hair. Eddie let out an involuntary shiver, tightening his hold on Richie's neck. "*God bless the moon and God bless me*."

"Rich," Eddie choked, letting out another broken sob. Richie's neck was wet and glistening with Eddie's snot at this point.

"I see the stars, the stars see me," Richie continued, starting to sway them slightly back and forth causing Eddie to let out a short, breathy laugh. "*God bless the stars and God bless me*."

"I love you," Eddie whispered, voice rough and crackly but so quiet he was sure Richie hadn't heard him.

"I know an angel watches over me," Richie sang, moving so his lips were brushing the shell of Eddie's ear, singing directly into it as they swayed slowly. *"God bless the angels and God bless me*."

24. Chapter 24

Notes for the Chapter:

idk...

“Eds?” Richie groaned, eyelids fluttering as he felt Eddie stir behind him. “Spaghetti?”

Richie paused, listing for any indication that Eddie was awake before settling comfortably and drifting back to sleep.

“Uh,” came a quiet, breathless grunt from behind him.

“Eddie?” Richie grumbled again, lifting his head from his pillow to peer over his shoulder at the sleeping boy behind him.

Although he got no verbal response, Richie could feel Eddie shuffling around behind him in his sleep. Richie rolled over, pulling Eddie to his chest in an attempt to help the other boy settle down as he always did when Eddie had a nightmare.

With one arm thrown above his head as he laid out on his back, Eddie curled into his side with Richie’s arm wrapped around him, Richie sighed, ready to fall back asleep.

The sound of a tiny whimper slipping past Eddie’s lips, slightly muffled against Richie’s chest, and Eddie’s body shuffling again made Richie’s eyebrows knot in frustration.

‘Dammit, Eddie!’ Richie sighed inwardly. *‘I’m so tired, just let me sleep!’*

“Mm,” Eddie let out a little moan.

“Eds-” Richie’s started, voice catching in his throat as his whole body tensed with realization. Eddie was rubbing himself against Richie’s thigh. “Oh, fuck,” Richie whispered, staring down at the top of Eddie’s head with wide eyes as his mind raced. Richie had no idea what he was supposed to do.

“Rich,” Eddie sighed, making Richie jolt in surprise as his whole body

flushed hotly.

Richie swallowed, rapidly blinking down at the top of Eddie's head as his vision swam.

'Eddie is rubbing his dick on my leg, Eddie is rubbing his dick on my leg! What the fuck!'

Richie's whole body felt like it was on fire, heart thumping wildly in his chest.

'No, no, no!' Richie thought to himself as he felt himself harden in his pajama pants, tenting the soft fleece material slightly. '*Do I wake him up? I should wake him up! Oh, fuck!*'

Eddie whined again, making Richie gulp nervously as the pressure of Eddie's hips on his thigh increased.

"Rich," Eddie whimpered again making Richie jump, dick twitching uncomfortably.

'Oh, God! I'm such a pervert!' Richie thought as he hesitantly moved the hand not holding Eddie's shoulder down to his crotch, pressing the heel of his palm against himself insistently.

"Ri-cheeeee," Eddie moaned, hips moving quicker, causing Richie to bite down on his lower lip as his fingers dipped past his elasticated waistband.

Richie let out his own choked moan as he felt Eddie's movement slow down to a near stop.

"*Fuck*, Eds," Richie grunted, his orgasm hitting him quickly and suddenly as his hips pushed up off the bed.

Richie blinked as his body settled down, Eddie now equally still. He grimaced as he pulled his hand out from his pajama pants, the front of the fleece material sticking to him uncomfortably as he wiped his hand against the sheets.

'What the fuck just happened?' Richie thought as he stared up at the ceiling in shock.

It was far from the first time he had touched himself like that, learning all about 'nutting' from Tommy Jenkins in the fifth grade. Since then Richie had taken to *jerking off*, as the boy had called it, on a regular basis.

'Does Eddie like-like me?' Richie wondered, recalling the way Eddie had moaned his name. *'Do I like-like Eddie?'*

The next morning Richie awoke to the sound of Eddie's strangled cry as he scrambled away from Richie.

"Eds?" Richie groaned, rubbing at his eyes as he pushed himself up into a sitting position. "What's wrong?" Richie asked reaching out to rest his hand against Eddie's back as his best friend faced purposely away from him at the edge of the bed. That's when what happened the previous night came rushing back to him.

' Fucking shit! '

"Nothing," Eddie responded, voice higher than usual.

"Spaghetti," Richie continued, thoughts racing as he tried to figure out how to apologize. "I'm so sorry!"

"What are you sorry for?" Eddie asked, twisting slightly to look back at the panicking Richie.

"What?"

"Why are you sorry?" Eddie repeated. "You didn't do anything."

"Why are you upset then?"

"I-" Eddie paused, turning his back on Richie once again with a blush.

"Eddie? What's going on?"

"Nothing, I just-" Eddie squeaked as Richie moved to sit next to him, hands pressed to the front of his pajama pants. "I'm sorry!"

“What?”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me, I’m sorry, Rich,” Eddie blubbered, curling away from Richie and making Richie’s stomach clench sadly.

“Eds, no it’s okay,” Richie promised, reaching out for his whimpering friend.

“It’s not okay, Rich,” Eddie moaned, removing his hands from his lap to reveal a dark wet spot and a slight tenting of the material. “I had a fuckin’ wet dream in your bed and now I’ve got a boner. I’m so disgusting!”

“Spaghetti, no,” Richie shook his head, wrapping an arm around Eddie’s shaking shoulders. “Look, me too,” Richie laughed, gesturing to his own morning wood.

Eddie flushed a darker red as he eyed Richie’s lap embarrassedly.

“Happens all the time, Spaghetti Man,” Richie continued, deciding not to mention what had happened in the middle of the night, far too embarrassed and ashamed of what he’d done.

“Rich?” Eddie whispered.

“Yeah?”

“Can I borrow some clean PJs?” Eddie squeaked, staring down at his hands in his lap.

“On one condition,” Richie laughed making Eddie look up at him in surprise, raising one eyebrow. “You gotta promise not to cream my pants, Kaspbrak!"

“Oh, my God! Richie!” Eddie shrieked, pushing his laughing friend away from him with burning cheeks.

25. S'ghetti-Love

Notes for the Chapter:

> sorry I've been so m.i.a. I've been on vacation and I spent the last week watching Queer as Folk for the first time and have kind of become obsessed with Britin (Brian and Justin) so I've been neglecting Reddie quite a bit. oops.
>
> If you haven't seen queer as folk: 10/10 would recommend!

“Hey, Rich,” Eddie greeted as his best friend slumped against the locker next to his after school one spring Friday afternoon.

“Hey,” Richie mumbled, rubbing at his left eye with a balled fist.

“Y’okay?” Eddie asked, looking between his locker and Richie’s pale face as he packed his belongings into his bag for the weekend.

“Headache,” Richie shrugged, dropping his fist to his side and leaning his head back against the cool metal locker behind him.

“Again?” Eddie frowned, zipping his bag and throwing it over his shoulder before gently closing his locker. Richie nodded shortly in response, groaning as he realized Eddie was ready to go and he had to start walking again. “Dizzy too?”

“Yup,” Richie sighed, shuffling along beside Eddie and through the crowded middle school hallways.

“Maybe we should cancel the sleepover tonight, Rich,” Eddie sighed in response. “You need to get some rest.”

“No, m’fine,” Richie shook his head, swallowing the growing bile in his throat.

“Rich,” Eddie tutted. “You’re not.”

“Am so,” Richie mumbled, rubbing at the ache in the back of his

neck. “S’fine, Spaghetti.”

“Stan and Bill are *not* coming over tonight Richie,” Eddie prompted as soon as Richie returned from his mad dash to the bathroom down the hall. “You look like shit.”

“Gee, thanks S’ghetti,” Richie mumbled, wiping at the tears that had gathered in the corners of his eyes while he was busy puking his guts out in the bathroom. “It’ll be fine.”

“I’m gonna tell your mom Rich,” Eddie threatened, crossing his arms over his chest as he watched Richie flop back against his bed.

“Eds,” Richie let out a long drawn out whine.

“Don’t ‘Eds’ me, Richie,” Eddie snipped, pinching at the pale skin poking out of Richie’s pants near his ankle as he sat perched on the end of Richie’s bed. “You *know* you need to take it easy when you get your migraines.”

“But Eds,” Richie continued to whine, moving to sit up and look directly at Eddie. “It’s bo-ring!”

“Richie,” Eddie scolded, crawling up the bed and pushing Richie down by his shoulders causing the curly haired boy to wince at the sudden impact of his head on his pillow. “I’m gonna go get your meds. Do. Not. Move.”

Richie relented, tossing a forearm over his eyes to block the light filtering through the curtains into the dim room as Eddie trampled down the stairs to collect Richie’s pain medication from Karen.

Richie had started experiencing head-splitting migraines as he entered into puberty, doctors blaming it on his fluctuating hormones. His doctor had prescribed him some strong pain killers that left him feeling like a numb zombie but it was the only treatment option they

had found that worked for Richie.

Eddie returned a few minutes later with Karen in tow.

“Another migraine, sweetheart?” Karen murmured as she entered the room carrying the little bottle of Richie’s medication as Eddie carried a tall glass of water.

“Yeah,” Richie croaked, moving his arm enough to peek up at his mother and best friend.

“M’kay,” Karen nodded, sitting down on the side of Richie’s bed and opening the cap of the medication bottle that she refused to leave in Richie’s care despite his many requests. “Here,” she mumbled, shaking out a single pill and holding it out to Richie.

“Thanks,” Richie muttered, taking the pill and tossing it into his mouth before taking the glass of water from Eddie who stood slightly behind his mother. “Thanks, S’ghetti,” he coughed, wiping the water left on his lips after gulping down the icy-cold liquid.

“I brought this too,” Eddie offered, holding out a blue and white ice pack.

“Thanks, bub,” Richie murmured, accepting the cold compress with a soft smile as Eddie flushed embarrassedly.

“How’re you feeling?” Eddie asked, leaning on his side with his head propped on his bent arm as he smiled down at Richie.

“Groovy, dude,” Richie slurred, head lolling from side to side on his pillow as his hooded eyes tried to focus on Eddie.

“Just try to sleep,” Eddie chuckled, reaching out to stroke Richie’s cheek with his knuckles as Richie’s mouth hung open slackly. Eddie hated seeing Richie under the influence of his pain medications but he hated leaving Richie alone and in pain even more.

“Stay wif me?” Richie slurred, arm flopping towards Eddie numbly as his fingers scrabbled for purchase in the fabric of Eddie’s t-shirt.

“Always, Rich,” Eddie whispered, pushing the curls hanging in Richie’s eyes back and smiling as they sprung back into place seconds later.

“Yay,” Richie cheered weakly, curling up on his side and tangling both of his hands in Eddie’s shirt. “S’ghetti-love.”

Eddie blushed deeply, eyebrows quirking in confusion and surprise at Richie’s slurred words.

“Sleep, Rich,” Eddie murmured, trying to quiet his best friend to spare himself embarrassment.

“My S’ghetti-love,” Richie slurred again, wriggling closer to Eddie’s body and burrowing his face against Eddie’s chest contentedly.

Eddie smiled down at Richie, cheeks still flaming as he began rubbing soothing circles into Richie’s tense back.

“Rich?” Eddie whispered as he listened to Richie’s slow and steady breaths. “Rich?”

After waiting a beat to ensure Richie was truly unconscious Eddie tilted his head down to press a feather light kiss to Richie’s cheek.

‘You’re so fucked,’ Eddie told himself as he watched Richie’s face twitch into a soft and content smile at the feeling of Eddie’s smooth and plush lips. *‘You’re so, so fucked.’*

Eddie groaned before pushing the arm he was propped on under Richie’s pillow and wriggling to find a comfortable position on his back with Richie’s head cushioned on his shoulder.

Eddie let out a long sigh.

“Love you, Rich,” he whispered into the dark curls tickling his chin before pressing another soft kiss to the crown of his head as his best friend snored quietly.

26. Up the Duff

“Is this gonna take long?” Richie sighed, collapsing onto the couch between his twin brother and older sister, Ted and Karen standing opposite them. "You know I’m supposed to call Eddie.”

“Enough, Richie,” Ted sighed, shaking his head at his impatient son.

“So,” Karen began, looking both nervous and excited. “Your father and I have some news to share with you.”

“Don’t tell me you’re up the duff!” Richie crowed in a mediocre attempt at an Australian accident.

“Richard!” Karen scolded as Ted rolled his eyes in irritation.

“What?” Richie shrugged.

“As it just so happens,” Karen responded haughtily with her hands on her hips. “I *am* pregnant.”

“What?!” Mike screeched as Richie burst out laughing and Nancy’s nose scrunched in disgust at the idea of her parents participating in the act of conceiving a child.

“Gross,” she muttered, crossing her arms over her chest as Richie continued to chuckle and nod in agreement with his sister.

“How?!” Mike cried. “Why?!”

“Well, Michael,” Richie began in a patronizing voice. “When a mommy and a daddy love each other-”

“Shut up, Richie!” Mike huffed, shoving his brother roughly and sending him toppling into Nancy who began whining about the boys hurting her.

Karen sighed, watching as the three pre-teens argued and shoved at one another.

“Hey, hey!” Ted shouted over them, clapping his hands to grab their

attention. “That’s enough! Your mothers happy about this-”

“Excuse me?” Karen scoffed, crossing her arms over her chest as she leaned away from Ted at the implication that he wasn’t pleased with the pregnancy. “*Your mothers happy?*”

“No, Karen,” Ted groaned. “I didn’t mean-”

“Save it, Ted,” Karen huffed, turning away from her husband angrily and towards her children who watched their argument play out. “So, anything you guys have to say? Questions? Anything?”

The three children looked at one another before turning back towards their parents.

“Yeah,” Richie nodded, taking the initiative to ask the first question. “How did dad manage to get it up long enough-”

“Not from you, Richard,” Karen interrupted, silencing her son with a shake of her head. “Nancy? Michael?”

“Will I have to babysit?” Nancy asked, already calculating the income she could make off of her unborn sibling. “Because Mrs. Johnson told me she’d pay me five dollars an hour-”

“Not you either,” Karen huffed. “Michael, sweetheart?” Karen tried, hoping her most sensitive child would have a more thoughtful question or statement to make.

“I don’t have any questions,” Mike started. “But I just want to make it clear that it can’t have my room!”

“Yeah,” Richie agreed. “Can’t have mine either!” he added, knowing full well his parents were going to try and lump him and Mike into a room together, their sole reasoning being that they were twins.

“Boys!” Ted groaned, exasperated by his children’s selfishness. “Really?”

“Well, it can’t!” Richie reiterated worriedly.

“Go to your rooms,” Karen huffed, exhausted by the entire

conversations. “All three of you. Conversation, over!”

“But, mom-”

“Over!” Karen repeated making them all sigh and trudge off up the stairs to their own bedrooms.

“Can you believe it?” Richie laughed, bouncing a red ball off the wall beside his bed as he lay across his duvet with the cord to the hallway phone stretched taught to reach into his room.

“That’s amazing!” Eddie responded, the bright smile on his face obvious in his tone of voice.

“Yeah, amazing my dad can still get it up long enough to get his dick wet,” Richie snorted, catching the ball in his right hand as it bounced back from the wall.

“Richie!” Eddie squealed with disgust though his amusement was evident. “You’re disgusting!”

“Quit it!” came a muffled scream along with a thump from the other side of the wall Richie was throwing his ball against.

“Rich,” Eddie chuckled, hearing Nancy’s yell of annoyance through the telephone. “Stop bugging Nancy.”

“I’m not,” Richie pouted innocently despite the fact that Eddie couldn’t see him.

“Sure, you’re not,” Eddie snorted. “You’re honestly telling me you haven’t bouncing that stupid ball against your wall for the last twenty minutes?”

“Yup,” Richie lied with a sheepish grin as Eddie giggled.

“You’re an idiot,” Eddie told him fondly. Richie could almost picture Eddie’s soft smile and cute, crinkled eyes. He loved when Eddie's eyes got all squinty when Richie was making him laugh.

“But I’m your idiot,” Richie shot back in a sing-song voice.

“Hmm,” Eddie hummed noncommittally as his cheeks flushed embarrassedly. “Anyway, back to your mom.”

“Oh yeah, and the spawn,” Richie nodded.

“Richie!” Eddie shrieked again. “Don’t call it a spawn.”

“But it is a spawn, Spaghetti,” Richie pointed out.

“You’re so annoying,” Eddie grumbled.

“You love it,” Richie teased before relenting and letting Eddie gush excitedly over his mom’s pregnancy. “But yeah, Karen and Ted’ve got a bun in the oven!”

“Oh, I bet it’ll be so cute,” Eddie cooed as though he was actually speaking to a toddler rather than his twelve-year-old best friend. “I wonder if they’ll have dark or light hair? It’s weird that your mom’s blonde but all of her kids have dark hair. And the gender! Y’know I’ve heard that after having a kid its more likely the next is the opposite gender-”

“That’s total bullshit, Spaghetti,” Richie snorted as he interrupted his best friend’s excited rambling. “Either way, no matter what the little spawn comes out as, all I know is it can’t have my room!”

“Huh?”

“You know they’re gonna try and shove Mike and I into one room, lumping us together like they always do,” Richie explained, squishing the rubber ball in his hand. “To make space for the little *bundle of joy*!”

“You guys have a spare room-”

“My mom’ll never get rid of the spare room,” Richie interrupted again. “Gotta make sure there’s space for my damn Bubbe every summer,” Richie explained, referring to his Jewish grandmother.

“Well, you never know,” Eddie offered in what he hoped was an

optimistic tone. “Maybe you’ll luck out-”

“Yeah, maybe we’ll get so lucky the old bat kicks the bucket,” Richie snorted.

“Richie!” Eddie scolded. “Don’t say that about your grandmother!"

“Spaghetti,” Richie huffed out a laugh. “She called you *‘that odd Edgar boy’* the whole month and a half she was here last summer and she’s known you since we were five.”

“You were five,” Eddie reminded Richie unnecessarily, always enjoying the fact that Richie’s birthday was so late in the year as it meant him and Mike were typically the youngest in their grade. “I was already six.”

“Whatever old man,” Richie rolled his eyes with a smile. “Either way she shut the door on you anytime you came over to hang out and refused to let you eat at the table because you aren’t kosher. Pfft, as if we’re kosher the other eleven months of the year she isn’t here…”

“Either way, she’s your grandmother,” Eddie reminded.

Richie paused listening as Eddie became muffled as he covered the receiver of his phone, obviously speaking with his mother.

“I gotta go, Rich,” Eddie sighed as he removed his hand from the receiver. “School night,” he muttered sarcastically, making Richie laugh. It was barely seven o’clock and the sun hadn’t even gone down yet.

“Righty-o,” Richie started in a British accent.

“Night, Rich,” Eddie spoke in a quiet and almost sad tone.

“Night, bub,” Richie murmured. “I’ll see you tomorrow morning?”

Eddie paused, stifling the nervous giggle that bubbled up in his throat at Richie’s pet name.

“Mhm,” Eddie hummed, twirling the curly telephone cable around one of his fingers as he blushed and grinned coyly at the ground.

“I’ll-” Richie started before the dial tone signalled an abrupt end to their phone call, no doubt courtesy of Sonia yanking the phone from its cable in the wall as she tended to do when Eddie, in her opinion, took too long to end his nightly phone call with Richie. “Night, S’ghetti. Don’t let the bed bugs bite,” he murmured pathetically to himself before dropping the phone down into the cradle on his floor and resuming his bouncing of the red ball against the wall separating his room from his sister’s.

27. Spin the Bottle

“Ugh,” Richie grunted, smacking his head against the lunch table as he tore his eyes away from their target who just so happened to be giggling and chatting animatedly with the new boy who, oddly enough, had started at their school at the end of term.

“W-what’s the pr-problem, Tr-truh-trashmouth?” Bill asked, looking up from his lunch to watch his friend curiously.

“Nothing,” Richie mumbled, words muffled by the table his face was pressed to.

“Sure,” Beverly snorted from next to him watching Eddie shamelessly flirt with the new guy, Mike Hanlon, in the lunch line and knowing Richie had been watching them since they had all sat down at their usual lunch table ten minutes ago.

“He’s allowed to have other friends, y’know,” Stan laughed as he twisted to look over his shoulder, following Beverly’s gaze.

“Don’t know what you’re talking about,” Richie continued to talk into the table, the bridge of his glasses pressing into his nose uncomfortably. “I don’t care what he-”

“That’s disgusting, Rich,” came his absolute favourite voice in the world from directly above him before a soft smack to the back of the head made him smile despite himself.

“Eds!” Richie shouted, picking his face up off of the grimy plastic table in front of him and leaning back to grin up at his best friend.

“Hey,” Eddie smiled softly, ruffling Richie’s curls and making the boy preen contentedly. “Why’re you making out with a lunch table?”

“Cause it’s hot,” Richie deadpanned as Eddie fell into the seat next to him, making Richie’s stomach churn pleasantly. “Not as hot as you though,” he whispered teasingly, leaning into Eddie’s personal space.

“Shut up, Richie,” Eddie huffed out a dismissive laugh as he pushed Richie’s away from him, cheeks flushing with a pleasant warmth

leaving Richie satisfied.

“Hey, Mike,” Beverly called, acknowledging the other boy who hovered self-consciously by Eddie. “Have lunch with us!”

“Okay, thanks,” Mike nodded, smiling gratefully at Beverly.

“Shit, sorry Mike,” Eddie apologized, completely forgetting to welcome the boy to their lunch table.

“S’okay, Eddie,” Mike reassured him, nudging him with an elbow that made Eddie smile.

“So,” Richie interrupted with a cough, attempting to draw Eddie’s attention away from this new Mike character. “Everyone going to Marcy’s party tonight?”

The group responded with affirmations of various levels of enthusiasm.

“Ugh,” Eddie groaned. “Only because you’re making me.”

“You’ll love it, my love,” Richie teased, poking Eddie’s nose with his index finger.

“*Richie*,” Eddie grumbled, swatting his hand away with pink cheeks as he surveyed the tables around them, hoping none of their classmates had heard.

“Wh-what about yuh-you, Mike?” Bill asked, noticing the new boy had remained silently picking at his lunch.

“Oh, I, uh,” Mike smiled tightly at the others. “I wasn’t invited.”

“Who cares?” Eddie waved off. “We’re inviting you!”

“I don’t know-”

“Marcy won’t mind,” Eddie insisted. “She’s invited so many people no one will even notice!”

“Um, okay,” Mike nodded embarrassedly. "Sure."

“Great,” Eddie grinned at Mike as Richie echoed his best friend’s words flatly.

“What time should I pick you boys up?” Karen asked, twisting in her seat to look back at Eddie, Richie, and Mike who were all starting to climb out of the car.

“Um,” Mike paused to think. “Ten?”

“That’s so early,” Richie complained. “Eleven-thirty?”

“What time do Marcy’s parents expect everyone to leave by? Eleven-thirty is late, Richie,” Karen asked, speaking to the boys through her window.

“Actually, her parents-”

“They said anytime is fine,” Richie interrupted, cutting Mike off before he could reveal to their mother that Marcy’s parents were out of town and had left her and her older brother alone for the week, entirely unaware they were hosting a party.

“Okay,” Karen conceded. “Eleven. Take it or leave it.”

“Eleven sounds great, mom,” Richie agreed eagerly. “See ya then,” he called over his shoulder as he began dragging his brother and best friend up the driveway towards Marcy’s house.

“You idiot,” Richie hissed, smacking his brother over the side of the head as Karen reversed out of the driveway.

“What?”

“Your mom doesn’t know there’s no parents,” Eddie explained.

“Duh,” Richie added, rolling his eyes.

“Punch?” Richie asked, wiggling the proffered plastic cup filled with watered down punch in Eddie’s face.

“No thanks,” Eddie cringed, thinking about the communal punch bowls Richie had collected their drinks from while Eddie hung back against a wall in the living room uncomfortably.

“It’s from the new bowl of punch Marcy just made,” Richie promised, smiling down at his best friend knowingly. “No germs, promise.”

“Thanks, Rich,” Eddie smiled, squeezing Richie’s shoulder as they both gulped down the sugary punch with a hint of the singular bottle of vodka that Marcy was rationing between punch bowls.

“Eddie!”

“Mike,” Eddie exclaimed happily, releasing Richie’s shoulder and turning to look for his new friend who had called out his name. “Hey, you made it,” Eddie smiled, wiping the red fruit punch mustache around his lips with the back of his hand.

“Yeah,” Mike nodded happily. “Hey Richie,” Mike added smiling at Richie as well.

“Hi, other-Mike,” Richie smiled weakly, speaking into his cup distractedly.

“Spin the bottle!” came the shrill voice of Betty Smith who had just cut the music thumping through Marcy’s house. “It’s time to play spin the bottle!”

“We can leave if you want, Eds,” Richie repeated for the fifth time since the entire party gathered in a circle around the now-empty vodka bottle in the middle of the room.

“It’s fine,” Eddie shook his head, staring determinedly at the bottle. “I’m *fine*.”

“Okay,” Richie sighed, leaning back on his arms which were spread

out behind him.

Richie watched as Eddie clammed up as everyone took turns spinning the bottle going around in a clockwise circle, his turn steadily approaching.

“Eddie’s turn!” Betty shouted, most enthusiastic about the game.

“Better watch out boys,” Troy Harrington warned, snickering with his friends as Richie scowled at them. “It’s the queer’s turn! Don’t want him giving you AIDS!"

Richie watched worriedly as Eddie bit down on his bottom lip, keeping his eyes steadily trained on the bottle he was reaching for with shaky hands as he tried to ignore Troy's cruel words.

The slight whistle of the bottle along the coffee table top and the sound of Troy and his friend’s snickers echoed in Eddie’s ears while he stared determinedly at the bottle as it came to a slow stop.

Richie and Eddie both gulped as the room erupted into cheers and laughter. Raising his eyes slowly, Eddie followed the direction of the bottle’s mouth to the individual it was point at.

Mike Hanlon. Shit.

‘He won’t do it,’ Richie told himself reassuringly. *‘There’s no way…’*

Eddie looked up at Mike with pink cheeks as their classmates continued to holler and laugh. Mike’s reassuring smile and slight nod made Eddie’s decision for him.

Richie felt his stomach drop as he watched Eddie crawl across the circle, around the coffee table holding the vodka bottle, and approach Mike.

‘No, no, no, no, no!” Richie's brain screamed, squeezing his eyes shut as Mike and Eddie’s lips met softly.

Eddie quickly pulled back from Mike, wiping vigorously at his lips with the sleeve of his shirt as he smiled at Mike apologetically. Mike shrugged, giving Eddie a bright smile before Eddie returned to his spot in the circle.

“Wh-” Eddie’s eyes scanned the circle, Richie obviously missing from the spot by the couch where they had been seated. “Where’s Richie?” Eddie asked as he settled next to Bill who had been sitting on the other side of Richie.

Bill shrugged before moving forward as he took his turn to spin the bottle on the coffee table.

“Have you seen Richie?” Eddie asked as he met Richie’s twin outside of Marcy’s house at eleven o’clock.

“Thought he was with you,” Mike frowned at the other boy as Karen pulled up right on time.

“Mom, hey,” Mike greeted as they approached the car.

“Ready to go?” Karen asked, rolling down her window.

“But, Richie-” Eddie started with a frown.

“Don’t worry, Eddie,” Karen smiled. “Richie went to bed as soon as he got home.”

“Richie went home?” Mike asked, eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“Yeah, he walked home,” Karen frowned at the two boys. “He wasn’t feeling well. Didn't he tell you he was leaving?”

“No, he did,” Mike shook his head, climbing into the passenger seat. “I… forgot,” Mike lied poorly.

“Rich?” Eddie whispered as he pushed the door to Richie’s room open.

The room was pitch black and silent. He could just make out the shape of Richie's back and his head of curls by the moonlight streaming in through the window.

"Rich?" Eddie repeated as he closed the door and shuffled towards Richie's bed. "You awake?" he asked, placing a knee on the bed and causing the mattress to dip.

Eddie sighed when his words were met with silence, moving to grab his pajamas and change in the silent darkness.

"Rich?" Eddie tried again once he was dressed in his soft flannel pajamas and was climbing in to bed next to Richie. "Are you really asleep?" he asked, placing a hand on Richie's shoulder.

Sighing as he felt Richie's back tense at his touch, revealing that he was in fact awake, Eddie blinked back confused tears. He wasn't entirely sure what he had done to upset Richie but he had a vague idea that it involved his kiss with Mike Hanlon.

"M'sorry," Eddie whispered, pressing his lips to Richie's shoulders softly and letting a couple of hurt tears fall as Richie continued to ignore him. "Night," Eddie whispered before rolling onto his other side, back to back with Richie on the narrow twin bed.

Eddie sniffled, wiping at his nose as he tried to force himself to fall asleep, hoping things would be fixed in the morning. His silent hopes were answered when one of Richie's legs shifted, his ankle hooking around one of Eddie's gently.

"Night, bub," Richie breathed so quietly that Eddie wasn't sure that he hadn't made it up.

28. Oval Beach

“Eds and I call backseat!” Richie screamed as he jumped down the front steps and bolted towards his dad’s station wagon with Eddie in tow.

“No one wants the stupid backseat, idiot,” Nancy rolled her eyes, following her brother and his best friend out of the house and towards the car.

The Wheeler family were going on their final family vacation to Oval Beach on Lake Michigan before the new baby came.

“Well, two nerds like you wouldn’t,” Richie scoffed, opening the trunk to the station wagon to reveal the back row of seats. “Eds and I do, though, right Spagehetti?”

“Sure, Rich,” Eddie nodded with a laugh.

“Then we hunt for crabs-”

“And look for beach-”

“Glass?” Richie finished Eddie’s statement. “Obviously, and then-”

“Hot dogs on the beach-”

“Then swimming-”

“But only-”

“After we wait thirty minutes, I know,” Richie laughed.

“Would you two put a sock in it?” Nancy groaned, interrupting the near constant stream of excited conversation between Eddie and Richie.

“Nancy,” Karen scolded lightly.

“It’s been like an hour mom,” Nancy whined. The speed and length of their conversation was typical for the two boys but usually Nancy could escape to another room for some peace and quiet.

“Just try to keep it down, boys,” Karen sighed, secretly agreeing with her daughter.

“Whatever,” Richie responded. “Spaghetti, can we play-”

“Are we there yet?” Richie groaned for the sixth time in less than half an hour. They were barely forty-five minutes into their three and a half our car journey.

“Ask me one more time and I’ll leave you on the side of the road,” Ted answered, eyes glued to the road.

“Asshole,” Richie grunted under his breath making Eddie laugh.

“Y’ okay, Eds?” Richie asked with concern as he listened to Eddie’s stomach gurgle uneasily.

“Mm hmm,” Eddie nodded, although his face had a slightly green tinge to it. “M’ fine.”

“You sure?” Richie asked, pushing the pillow that was settled between them for comfort out of the way. “You don’t look so good.”

“Gee, thanks, Rich,” Eddie joked. “I’m fin-blurgh.”

“Shit!” Richie screamed, twisting away from Eddie as vomit splattered the trunk door in front of them and ricocheted back at his and Eddie’s shins.

“Oh, my God! Ew!” Nancy began shrieking, pinching her nose and leaning forward to move away from the vomit splattered boys.

“I’m sorry!” Eddie wailed while scratching at his arms uncomfortably. “I-I-I-”

“It’s okay, Spaghetti,” Richie reassured, swallowing the growing bile in his own throat as he stared down at his sickly legs. “It’s okay, no one’s mad.”

“It’s on me!” Eddie continued to scream as Ted pulled in to a rest stop.

“It’s okay,” Richie promised, unfastening his seatbelt as his dad opened the trunk door to let them out. “We’re gonna clean you up, it’s okay.”

“It’s on me,” Eddie repeated, sobbing and clutching his stomach.

“Good?” Richie asked, wrapping an arm around Eddie in their new spot in the middle row of seats in Ted’s station wagon where Eddie could face forward.

“Mm,” Eddie hummed noncommittally, rubbing his cheek against Richie’s shoulder as his heavy eyes fluttered drowsily. Embarrassingly enough Karen had dragged both boys into the women’s’ washroom at the rest stop to wipe them down and get them in to clean clothes before feeding Eddie motion sickness tablets from the small rest stop convenience store. “Jus’ tired,” he mumbled.

“Sleep,” Richie encouraged, rubbing a hand up and down Eddie’s arm as he tried to ignore Nancy and Mike’s whines about having to sit in the back seat.

“You little shit!” Richie bellowed, chasing Eddie who howled with laughter down the beach and around the bend in the forest. “I’m gonna get you for that!”

“You’ll never catch me,” Eddie screamed, racing ahead of Richie. “You’re too slow!”

“I am,” Richie puffed, catching up to Eddie who had begun to slow

down as his lungs spasmed, threatening an asthma attack. “Not!” he shouted in victory as he side-tackled Eddie to the ground.

“Richie!” Eddie laughed as they collapsed into the warm sand.

“Gotcha!” Richie grinned down at Eddie from where he hovered over him on his hands and knees.

“You cheated,” Eddie pointed out with a grin.

“I would never,” Richie shook his head, continuing to smile down at his best friend as his head slowly leaned down towards Eddie’s.

“Rich,” Eddie whispered, face falling slack as he stared up at Richie with wide eyes. “What’re you doing?”

“I dunno,” Richie whispered back as their lips brushed, sending a jolt through Eddie’s body. Richie braced for impact, expecting Eddie to gut punch him and send him flying into the sand for bringing his germy mouth anywhere near Eddie’s.

Instead Eddie let out a little sigh that made Richie’s stomach swirl pleasantly.

“Richie! Eddie! Lunch!”

The two jolted apart, staring at one another with wide eyes. Richie reacted first, scrambling to his feet and reaching out a hand to pull Eddie up with him.

“Race ya?” Richie asked as Eddie brushed sand from the back of his blue striped swim trunks.

Eddie grinned, pushing Richie backwards into the sand before taking off towards the cabin down the beach.

“First one back gets top bunk!” Eddie screamed.

“Hey!” Richie shouted, jumping to his feet and chasing after Eddie. “I already got top bunk fair and square!”

“Hamburger or sausage, Eddie?” Ted asked as he flipped a burger on the grill.

“Oh, Eds love sausage,” Richie piped up, handing Eddie a plate from the stack his mother had asked him to bring out to set the patio table for lunch. “Right, Eds?”

“I’ll have a hamburger, please,” Eddie squeaked, cheeks pink with the effort it took to hold back his laughter at Richie’s innuendo.

“One hamburger,” Ted announced, dropping a grilled patty onto the hamburger bun on his outstretched plate. “Richie?”

“Sausage, dad,” Richie responded, coming up behind Eddie with his own plate and sausage bun. “I always love a good sausage.”

Eddie snorted with a hand pressed to his mouth in a fruitless attempt to smother his laughter. Richie grinned at Eddie proudly, always pleased when he could make Eddie laugh.

“Richard!” Karen reprimanded as Richie gagged on his sausage, spitting out chunks of spicy pork and bread. “You’re going to choke! That’s enough!”

“Sorry,” Richie coughed, wiping his greasy mouth with the back of his hand as he shot a giggling Eddie a smirk.

Richie had spent the entire meal crudely trying to fit as much of his sausage into his mouth as he could at once as Eddie giggled and shook his head, taking his own small and careful bites of hamburger.

“Impressed?” Richie muttered to Eddie as Nancy told her parents about her summer reading list for her first year of high school.

“You’re disgusting, Rich,” Eddie shook his head, smiling up at Richie brightly.

“You’ve got…” Richie grabbed a napkin and reached over to wipe away the smudge of ketchup on the corner of Eddie’s mouth. “There,” he smiled, scrunching the napkin and dropping it down on the table.

“Thanks,” Eddie blushed, looking down at his plate and hoping the rest of the table hadn’t been watching them.

“Race ya!” Richie screamed, splashing into the lake as he and Eddie ran from the beach and into the cool water after waiting the allotted thirty minutes after their lunch.

“No!” Eddie screamed back, pouting as they both paddled their way towards the platform that floated in the lake about fifty feet from the shoreline.

“Beat ya!” Richie called as he climbed up onto the platform, dripping water all over the wooden planks along the top as Eddie struggled over to him.

“That,” Eddie huffed and puffed, letting Richie pull him up and out of the water. “Was unfair!”

“How?” Richie countered.

“You’re a better swimmer,” Eddie crossed his arms over his chest. Sonia had refused to take Eddie to swimming lessons and kept Eddie from the mandatory swims in their gym classes throughout seventh grade.

“That’s not my fault,” Richie shrugged. “Give me a score,” Richie told him before taking a running jump off of the platform and diving into the dark lake.

“Three out of ten!” Eddie laughed as Richie resurfaced, pushing his dark locks out of his eyes.

“That deserved at least an eight,” Richie argued, floating towards the platform.

“A four point five at best,” Eddie taunted as Richie stuck out his tongue. “Help?” Richie asked, placing one arm and knee up on the

platform and raising the other one up for Eddie to take.

Eddie reached down, grabbing Richie's hand only to feel a strong tug from Richie's end. Eddie shrieked as he went toppling over the edge of the platform and into the murky lake.

"You asshole!" Eddie laughed, wiping the water from his eyes and smacking a laughing Richie on the back of the head.

"Oops," Richie giggled. "Sorry, it was an accident," he apologized, not sounding the least be apologetic.

"Rich," Eddie whispered as their laughter trailed off, lake water lapping around his chin as they remained on the spot, each treading water leisurely.

"Yeah?" Richie whispered back, eyes wide and hopeful.

Eddie waded closer to Richie, placing his hands on Richie's shoulders as he continued to kick his feet, toes occasionally bumping into Richie's. Eddie gulped, peeking over Richie's shoulder to ensure they were hidden from view of everyone on the beach by the floating platform, before leaning forward to press his lips to Richie's.

Richie's lips were cold and wet, making them feel almost slimy. They tasted vaguely like lake water and spicy sausage from their lunch.

Breaking apart with deep gulps of air, the two leaned their foreheads against one another's. Eddie closed his eyes as he caught his breath, feet still pumping beneath the water to keep him afloat while Richie watched him with wide eyes, jaw hanging slackly as he took in Eddie's blurry face.

"Wanna," Richie started, voice cracking nervously. Richie cleared his throat before starting again. "Wanna go under the dock?"

"Huh?" Eddie asked, opening his eyes. His cheeks flushed pink as he realized how close Richie was to him.

"The dock," Richie repeated. "If you swim under there's like an air pocket or whatever."

“Why would we-”

“We don’t have to,” Richie rambled, interrupting Eddie before he could make fun of Richie’s suggestion. “I just, nevermind.”

“Let’s do it,” Eddie whispered, eyes focused on Richie’s downcast gaze.

Eddie gasped as he resurfaced after swimming under the platform where Richie was waiting for him.

“Watch your head,” Richie warned, reaching out to place a hand between the top of Eddie’s head and the platform above them. The pocket of air was barely a foot high.

Eddie smiled in appreciation before looking around.

“Rich,” he gasped, reaching out for his best friend as he took in the slimy wood that surrounded them, blackened from the algae and mould growing on the planks. “I don’t like it,” he whimpered.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Richie comforted. “We can go. Let’s go,” he encouraged, pressing a kiss to Eddie’s cheek before swallowing a gulp of air and ducking down into the water.

Richie led Eddie under water and out from under the platform, Eddie kicking his feet as fast as he could as he squeezed Richie’s hand between both of his own.

Both gasped for air as they resurfaced in the open air, still blocked from view of the beach.

“Better?” Richie asked, squeezing the hands still holding his own. Eddie nodded. “I’m sorry, that was stupid. I shouldn’t have-”

“No,” Eddie interrupted with a shake of his head. “It’s okay. I’m sorry I ruined it.”

“You didn’t ruin anything,” Richie protested, reeling Eddie in closer

to him and pressing a hesitant kiss to Eddie's lips.

"You're gonna burn, Rich," Eddie shook his head, rubbing coconut lotion into his biceps as he watched Richie lay on his beach towel.

"The sun's going down," Richie pointed out as they lay on the beach after dinner. "Sunsets can't burn ya!"

"That's not even kind of true, Rich," Eddie laughed, shaking his head as he lay back against his own towel next to Richie.

"It's a scientific fact, Spaghetti," Richie promised. "Besides, I gotta beat ya!"

The two had started a contest to see who could get the tannest skin by the end of summer and they only had two weeks left. Despite Sonia's best efforts to keep Eddie from the outdoors, Eddie spent most of his summer at the Wheelers' house, riding bikes and messing around in their backyard. Eddie always slathered himself in sunscreen, not wanting to get skin cancer, but his olive skin had a way of naturally tanning that Richie's pasty white skin did not. So far Richie had burnt himself to a crisp a total of four times that summer, each time fading from lobster red right back to ghostly white within a week.

"You're an idiot," Eddie shook his head with a smile, face turned up to watch the clouds pass over the pink and orange sky.

"I'm your idiot, though," Richie prompted, arm moving across the sand to bump into Eddie's.

"Right, S'ghetti?" he finished, flattening his palm against Eddie's red patterned towel and tickling his pinky finger up and down the side of Eddie's hand.

"Unfortunately, yeah," Eddie joked, unfurling his fist and letting Richie wrap his pinky around Eddie's sweetly.

Both boys blushed, continuing to stare up into the hazy sky that was

growing darker with the passing seconds with huge grins splitting their faces.

“It’s too hot,” Richie whined from the bottom bunk where he lay still, sticky Aloe gel covering him from head to toe. He had been too burnt and sore to climb the ladder to the top bunk.

“Shut up,” Mike groaned from his bed across the room.

“I told you to put on sunscreen,” Eddie quipped from the top bunk, the slight smile obvious in his voice.

“You both suck!” Richie grumbled. He had stripped down to his underwear before coating every inch of his exposed skin in Aloe Vera gel. He was absolutely freezing, his body shaking with chills, but confusingly enough his skin felt like it was on fire and he couldn’t bare covering it with clothes or sheets.

“Try to sleep, Rich,” Eddie sighed, shifting around on the top bunk causing the frame to squeak and groan.

“Rich?” Eddie grumbled, waking to the sound of Richie’s pained whimpers. “Y’ okay?”

“Hurts,” Richie cried, fisting the sheets of the bottom bunk in frustration.

Eddie sighed, climbing down the ladder to assess Richie’s condition.

“Is it really that bad, Rich?” Eddie asked, surveying his best friend through the dim lighting coming from the lamp on Mike’s side of the room.

“Hurts so bad, S’ghetti,” Richie moaned.

Eddie tutted, taking a seat on Richie’s bed and frowning down at him.

“It’s a bad burn, Rich,” Eddie admitted, running his fingers through Richie’s curls in what he hoped was a comforting gesture.

“Make it better, S’ghetti,” Richie whimpered, grabbing one of Eddie’s arms and tugging on it pleadingly.

“S’ nothing I can do, babe,” Eddie admitted, cheeks flushing at the pet name that fell involuntarily from his lips. “We got you Aloe and pain killers. You just gotta wait it out, unfortunately.”

Richie whined sadly at Eddie’s words, pouting up at Eddie like a child.

“Hey,” Eddie laughed. “Don’t give me that look. You know I’d stop it if I could.”

Richie continued to pout sadly making Eddie roll his eyes with amusement before peeking over his shoulder to double check that Mike was still asleep.

Finding that the other boy was still deeply unconscious Eddie did the only thing he could think of to assuage Richie’s pain, leaning down to press his lips against Richie’s softly.

“Get some rest,” Eddie whispered as their lips parted, breath ghosting across Richie’s face causing him to shiver pleasantly.

“Wait,” Richie whined, grabbing Eddie’s wrist as he moved to stand up. “Stay with me? Please?"

Eddie worried his lip between his teeth, throwing another glance in Mike’s direction.

“I dunno…”

“Please, bub?” Richie whispered softly, squeezing Eddie’s fingers between his own. “Please stay with me. It hurts so bad.”

Eddie sighed, smoothing the back of his knuckles against one of Richie’s cheekbones thoughtfully before climbing over Richie’s body and settling on the mattress behind him.

“Thank you,” Richie whispered, curling up against Eddie before reluctantly shrinking away from his best friend, the skin on skin contact too much for his badly burned skin.

“Sleep,” Eddie reminded him, tangling his fingers in Richie’s hair and scratching at his scalp comfortingly.

29. Miss You

Notes for the Chapter:

> Turns out I'm still alive! Believe me, I'm as surprised as you are...
>
> I have two exams tomorrow so obviously, as per tradition, I've wasted an hour writing instead of studying... I LOVE ENGINEERING WOOO
>
> I dont know...

“Rich?” Eddie whispered, lips brushing Richie’s softly and disrupting the silence in the boys’ shared room at the Oval Beach cabin.

“Hmm?” Richie hummed, eyes fluttering open to meet Eddie’s.

It was nearing three in the morning and the boys were piled into the bottom bunk with their knees and noses pressed together.

“What,” Eddie paused, clearing his throat and tilting his head to avoid Richie’s gaze, forehead bumping into the bridge of Richie’s nose softly. “Rich, what… *are* we?”

“What d'ya mean?” Richie breathed, squeezing Eddie’s shoulder to get him to look up at him.

“Y’ know,” Eddie shrugged. “Like are we… I don’t know… Are we like, boyfriend and gir-” Eddie paused, cheeks flushing as he ducked his head once again.

“Girlfriend?” Richie teased, holding in the laughter that threatened to bubble from his throat. He knew laughing at Eddie’s mistake would only upset the other boy.

“Shut up,” Eddie muttered, bringing a knee up to dig into Richie’s side. “You know what I mean.”

“We can be whatever we wanna be, S’ghetti,” Richie answered, curling his fingers into the hair at the bag of Eddie’s head and

watching as the moonlight filtering through the curtains shimmered against the soft highlights in Eddie's mousy brown curls, lightened from their summer spent in the sun.

"What if I don't know what I wanna be?" Eddie mumbled, fingers plucking nervously at the front of Richie's t-shirt.

"What?" Richie squeaked, massaging fingers stilling against Eddie's scalp as he let Eddie's words sink in. "You don't… You don't wanna be my boyfriend?" he whispered, voice falling lower and lower.

"I-I-" Eddie stuttered before bursting into tears and rolling himself on top of a surprised Richie. "I can't, Rich," Eddie hissed as his tears dribbled onto Richie's neck.

"Shh," Richie hushed him, wrapping his arms around his best friend as he tried to quiet the other boy before they woke his brother up. "Hey, calm down. It's okay, I'm here."

"My mom," Eddie whispered, sniffling back tears. "She, she'll-"

"Bub," Richie murmured, lips pressed to the shell of Eddie's ear. "It's okay…"

"It's *not* okay, Rich," Eddie whined, shuffling to wipe his tears and snotty nose against the front of Richie's shirt. "I've, I've been *happy*… I *like* this... *us.* Whatever this *us* is..."

"Me too," Richie agreed, eyebrows furrowing in confusion. "But then, why are you so upset?"

"Because Richie!" Eddie exclaimed, pushing himself up from Richie's chest to straddle his hips.

"Shh," Richie hissed, squeezing Eddie's wrists on either side of his shoulders as his eyes turned to the bed on the other side of the room where Mike slept.

"I'm not gay, Rich," Eddie stated once they were sure Mike was still asleep.

"Bub-"

“No,” Eddie shook his head, scowling down at Richie. “I’m not a fag. *We’re* not fags. We can’t be.”

“Eddie…” Richie frowned, staring up at his best friend in confusion. It felt like he was speaking to a complete stranger.

“I can’t be, Richie,” Eddie continued, swallowing nervously as his eyes flitted around. “My mom would…” Eddie trailed off shaking his head as he thought about what his mother would do if he told her he was a homosexual.

“S’ghetti,” Richie breathed, releasing Eddie’s wrists and cupping the other boy’s cheeks between his hands, swiping at the residual tears on his cheeks. “Please don’t do this,” Richie begged.

The two had spent the last two weeks at Oval Beach splashing around in the lake with Mike and Nancy and sneaking off to share secret kisses. They both could agree that it had been the best two weeks of their young lives.

“M’sorry, Rich,” Eddie whispered sadly before moving to climb off of Richie.

“Wait,” Richie croaked, his own eyes brimming with tears as he reached out to stop Eddie from fleeing the bottom bunk. “I-I,” Richie paused, trying to gather his swirling thoughts. “I know you’re scared, but we can do this,” Richie insisted.

“Rich,” Eddie sighed, shaking his head and pulling his hand from Richie’s grasp before fleeing to the top bunk.

Eddie sighed quietly as he settled into the top bunk, listening to the distinct sound of Richie sniffling and trying to quiet his sobs in a pillow. Eddie swallowed, stomach churning as he let his own tears fall.

“Richie, sweetheart,” Karen frowned as Richie emerged from the boy’s room to join his family at the kitchen table for breakfast the following morning before they packed up for the long drive back to

Hawkins. “You don’t look so good. Are you alright?”

“M’fine,” Richie croaked, voice rough and face swollen from his night of crying.

“Morning, Eddie,” Karen called, turning her attention from her sullen son who had begun to pile his plate with food as Eddie exited the door Richie had just come from. “How are-” Karen stopped short, taking in Eddie’s equally dishevelled and exhausted appearance.

Karen watched as Richie looked up from his now full plate, watching Eddie as he hovered by the kitchen door, seemingly hesitant to join the Wheelers for breakfast.

“Eddie, honey,” Karen waved him over. “Come eat.”

Eddie nodded, eyes downcast as he took a seat in the empty chair next to Richie’s before dropping his gaze to his lap and fiddling with his fingers. Karen hadn’t seen Eddie act this quiet and shy in years.

“Hey,” Nancy called, grabbing Eddie’s shoulder as he walked past her room on his way to finish packing his bag. “Come here,” she told him, pulling him into her room.

“What happened?” Nancy asked, sitting Eddie down on the bed in her room as Eddie peered around the tidy room in an attempt to avoid eye contact.

“Nothing,” Eddie muttered, eyes falling to his lap where he twisted his fingers together. “Nothing happened.”

“Nothing happened?” Nancy echoed in disbelief. “So, you and Richie both just decided to look like the walking dead and avoid each other like the plague this morning for no reason?”

“Nothing happened,” Eddie repeated, looking up at Nancy with a hard stare. “Okay?”

Nancy sighed, nodding as Eddie pushed himself up from her bed and slunk out of the room.

“Alright kids,” Karen called into the cabin once Ted had the station wagon packed. “Let’s go!”

“And no fighting over spots,” Karen warned as all four of the kids exited the cabin. “Eddie needs to sit facing forward and that’s the last I want to hear of it.”

“But mom,” Nancy started to whine as the other three headed for the car. “It’s not fair! I don’t…” she trailed off as she watched Richie climb into the trunk seat of the car while Eddie took up one of the forward-facing seats.

Karen and Nancy both shared a confused look as they watched the two best friends face purposely away from one another.

“Thank you for bringing me along Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler,” Eddie spoke quietly as they pulled up outside of Eddie’s home in Hawkins.

“Please, Eddie. You’re welcome anytime, sweetie,” Karen smiled warmly as Eddie climbed out of the car.

“Thanks,” Eddie nodded before turning to look at the back of Richie’s head nervously. “Um, bye, Rich,” Eddie called.

“Bye,” came Richie’s curt response, head turned forcefully away from Eddie making Eddie’s stomach drop and heart clench painfully.

“Hey, Mike,” Richie called, rushing down the stairs into the basement in search of his brother. “Wanna come see *Caddyshack* at the theatre-oh,” Richie sighed, realizing that Mike and his nerdy friends were playing their stupid game again.

“Go away, Richie!” Mike groaned. “You’re ruining the game!”

Richie sighed, trudging back up the stairs sadly. There was only a week and a half left of summer and he had been dying to go and see *Caddyshack* in theatres for weeks. He and Eddie had planned to go and see it together once they returned from Michigan but still hadn't spoken since their return.

Richie flopped back against the sofa in the living room next to his mom. There was still more than a week before school started and his other friends were all still away on various trips with their families for the summer.

"What's wrong, Richie?" Karen hummed, looking up from her novel and carding her fingers through the front of Richie's curls. She had been watching the boy sulk around for days now and could tell that something had happened with Eddie, but knew better than to try and get involved with two when they were arguing. Although rare, when the two fought they really went at it and knew how to hurt one another.

"Nothing," Richie sighed, staring glumly at the television which played a football game that Ted was watching. "Jus' bored. Stan's still on his jew-y family vacation, Ben's visiting his aunt, and Bill's in Maine with his parents."

"Well, why don't you call Eddie?" Karen murmured, eyes still mostly focused on her book.

"He's busy," Richie mumbled.

"That's too bad," Karen hummed, flipping the page in her book. "Maybe later then?"

"Yeah," Richie whispered. "Maybe later…"

An hour later Richie found himself standing in line for popcorn at Hawkins Cinema, having decided to just see the flick on his own.

"Here you go," the bored teenage girl working the concession stand sighed, handing Richie a large tub of popcorn.

“Thanks,” Richie mumbled, turning to head to the theatre that would be showing *Caddyshack*.

"...you little faggot!"

Richie stopped just short of entering the theatre as he heard the chilling yet familiar voice of one Troy Harrington.

Continuing down the hallway towards the bathrooms Richie peeked around the corner where he heard the voice coming from.

“I-I’m not!”

“Liar,” Troy snorted, pinning a wriggling Eddie to the wall just outside the men’s washroom. “You and Wheeler probably butt-fuck every night."

“No,” Eddie protested, cheeks flushed with anger and embarrassment as older men came and went, eyeing them curiously but neglecting to intervene. “I, I’m not-”

“Harrington!” Richie called, setting his popcorn down on a nearby bench. “Hey, Harrington!”

“Oh, look,” Troy sneered, peering over his shoulder with a grim smile. “It’s your *boyfriend*!”

“He’s not my-” Eddie started to protest as Richie stalked towards them.

“Leave him alone!” Richie demanded, shoving at Troy’s shoulder, feeling particularly brave since he knew Bowers was also out of town.

“Make me,” Troy taunted releasing Eddie and turning to shove at Richie’s shoulders.

“Hey! You three!” came a new voice.

All three boys turned to meet the eyes of an unhappy employee standing with her hands on her hips.

“No roughhousing in the theatre or you’re out,” she warned.

“S-sorry, we were just going to o-our movie,” Eddie stuttered out nervously.

“Tickets?” the employee asked, eyeing the boys suspiciously.

Richie and Eddie handed their tickets over immediately, eyes wide with fear.

“Where’s yours?” the woman asked, handing the boys their tickets back and turning to look at Troy.

“I, uh,” Troy swallowed. “I lost it.”

“No ticket, no movie,” the employee answered, popping her gum disinterestedly. “Come on,” she said before ushering a scowling Troy to the exit.

“You alright?” Richie asked, turning to Eddie once the other two were gone.

“M’fine,” Eddie nodded, brushing at non-existent lint on his t-shirt.

“Good,” Richie nodded before moving to grab his popcorn and head into the theatre before the movie started.

“Richie, wait,” Eddie called, grabbing Richie’s shoulder.

“What?” Richie sighed, turning on his heel to stare down at Eddie.

“I, uh,” Eddie stuttered looking briefly down at his feet. “I just… I just wanted to say I’m uh, I’m sorry."

“What for?” Richie shrugged, trying to feign nonchalance.

“You know what for, Richie,” Eddie sighed, glaring up at this best friend.

“Don’t know what you’re talking ‘bout, Eds,” Richie shrugged again, turning to leave.

“Richie, stop,” Eddie groaned, grabbing his shoulder again. “I’m serious. I’m sorry I hurt your feelings. I never wanted to do that.”

“I know,” Richie sighed, licking at his lips that had become dry in the air-conditioned theatre. “Listen, what movie are you seeing?” Richie asked, changing the subject quickly.

“Uh, *Caddyshack*,” Eddie muttered, eyes still downcast.

“Me too,” Richie replied. “Wanna sit together?”

Eddie looked up at Richie sharply, taking in Richie’s attempt at a neutral expression. Unfortunately for Richie, the sadness and hurt was clear as day to Eddie.

“Sure,” Eddie whispered, giving Richie a hopeful half smile.

“So,” Richie started as the exited the theatre an hour and a half later, blinking against the bright lights of the movie theatre’s lobby. “Ice cream?”

Eddie smiled up at Richie, eyes scrunching at the corners as he nodded. Going to the Hawkins Creamery after the movies had been a tradition since they were children, Frank having convinced Sonia to let the three attend a movie one Saturday a month when they were in kindergarten. As they grew older their tradition continued and at twelve years old Eddie had finally convinced Sonia to drop him off at the theatre and pick him up at the ice cream parlour rather than come in to watch the movie with them.

“Oh my God, Richie!” Eddie shrieked with laughter, snorting his milkshake through his nose as Richie’s shared his newly detailed plan to pull a *Caddyshack* prank on their friends at Bill’s pool when their friends came back from their various summer vacations.

Richie laughed, grabbing a napkin and handing it to Eddie as was tradition. They hadn’t gone a single movie weekend since they were five without Eddie shooting melted ice cream through his nose.

“Thanks,” Eddie blushed, smiling as he dabbed at his nose and held his forehead as a brain freeze overtook him.

“Welcome,” Richie murmured, watching Eddie with a soft smile.

“What?” Eddie muttered self-consciously as Richie continued to stare at him intently. “What?” Eddie insisted as Richie shrugged cryptically.

“Nothing,” Richie shook his head, looking away from Eddie and down at his melting sundae.

“Rich,” Eddie sighed, placing a soft hand on Richie’s forearm. “Tell me,” he breathed.

“You know *what*, Spaghetti,” Richie whispered, eyes trained on his spoon as he swirled it through chocolate sauce.

Eddie sniffed, scratching the side of his nose awkwardly before copying Richie and swirling his straw through his vanilla shake.

“M’sorry,” Eddie mumbled against the tip of his straw, head bent down to avoid Richie’s eyes.

“I know,” Richie sighed, stuffing a scoop of melted ice cream into his mouth. “I jus’ miss you,” Richie garbled around the cool liquid before swallowing.

Eddie cocked his head to the side to watch Richie, lips still wrapped firmly around his straw but curled into a sad smile.

“Thanks for waiting with me,” Eddie muttered as the two sat side by side on the bench out front of the ice cream parlor.

“Course, Eds,” Richie shrugged, scuffing his shoes against the pavement.

Eddie frowned, saddened by Richie’s use of the nickname. He so rarely used it when it was just the two of them and when he did, it typically meant he felt uncomfortable.

“Rich,” Eddie whispered, sliding his hand out across the length of the bench between them.

“Hmm?” Richie hummed, looking up from his dirty sneakers just as Eddie’s pinky finger hooked around Richie’s own finger. Richie’s eyes darted around them to make sure no one was watching them.

“I’m sorry, Rich,” Eddie apologized, trying to convey the meaning behind his actions with his eyes. “I miss you too.”

Richie smiled softly before throwing his free arm around Eddie’s shoulders and pulling him into the best hug he could whilst the were two sat side by side on a wooden bench.

“Hi,” Richie murmured against the shell of Eddie’s ear, lips puckering to press a hard kiss just behind Eddie’s ear making the smaller boy blush.

“Hi,” Eddie sighed, disentangling his fingers from Richie before throwing his arm around Richie neck to pull himself closer to the other boy. “Miss you,” Eddie mumbled, lips tickling Richie’s neck.

“Well ‘m right here, bub,” Richie answered, inhaling the scent of Eddie’s antibacterial soap and the *Herbal Essences* shampoo that Sonia bought.

Eddie let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, feeling like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

They would be okay.